FILM QUARTERLY

Film Quarterly

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JULIO MEDEM'S *CHAOTIC ANA*

AVANT-GARDE FILM AND VIDEO

A VANISHED AMERICA

CONTROL, SICKO, TRANSFORMERS

"CLOVERFIELD"

CRUISING ON DVD

AVANT-GARDE FILM AND VIDEO

Volume 61 Number 2

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FROM HANDMADE TO HI-TECH

In addition to regular commentary on narrative cinema and documentary, *Film Quarterly* has a useful role to play from time to time by publishing accessible writing about avant-garde film and video. Although there are rare exceptions (such as Matthew Barney's films), this work is mostly not screened theatrically, which is one reason for it slipping through the net of magazine coverage. Screenings often take place in venues that belong to a hydra-headed urban art scene rather than the commercial cinema circuit. It makes sense therefore to explore such a scene in detail, as Nicky Hamlyn does in his round-up of recent London shows. The article reflects a new *Film Quarterly* policy emphasis on "film culture," which is to say the ways in which movies are related to place, time, and audience. The round-up's setting is local, but its focus is international, including Chinese makers and several North American veterans, as well as young British artists.

Part of the avant-garde project in this area is to invite viewers to engage with movies that lack cinematic storytelling, character psychology, or conventional visual spectacle. Modernist self-questioning, especially a self-reflexive desire to bring the means and materials of production into the open, connects artists who otherwise have little in common. Scott MacDonald describes how David Gatten "throws film stock into the South Carolina surf (in a crab trap) and allows natural forces to etch imagery into the filmstrip" and also his habit of "painstakingly tearing the filmstrip in two, then reassembling it." John Minkowsky discusses "electro-optical installations" by Woody Vasulka, "elaborate kinetic systems of electronic observation" that raise questions about surveillance, computerization, and robotic epistemology. Gatten, a bibliophile and antiquarian, has a handmade aesthetic; Vasulka, theoretician and engineer, is a hi-tech conceptualist. Yet both artists foreground questions about the medium—whether it be the flimsy stuff of celluloid, pulsating video signals, or just an intangible stream of encoded data.

⁂

A word or two on the updated policy regarding film reviews. We aim to publish essay-length reviews within about six months of films' U.S. theatrical release (which in some cases will be quite limited). The same timeframe applies to coverage of archival DVD reissues. Sometimes it will be possible to publish reviews in advance of a U.S. release, as in the case of the essay on *Chaotic Ana*.

Reviewers are invited to contextualize and make comparisons; we will regularly publish essays with a dual or even triple focus, in the manner of Mark Sinker's contribution. So that they may prove durable, reviews will generally be based on more than one viewing, and, as with all other pieces in the magazine, they are likely to contain spoilers.

The new policy encompasses one further mode of argument: advocacy. Given that there is only limited room for reviews, it is appropriate to prefer films that essayists deem to be worth standing up for. Advocacy is understood here as involving independent-minded evaluation and close reading. Paul Julian Smith's remarks about *Chaotic Ana*, which has not been warmly received by Spanish critics, are in these respects a model: referring to the film's aesthetic devices, Smith proposes an alternative to the received wisdom.

To encourage reviewing that is intellectually robust but not overextended, we are pleased to announce an essay prize to coincide with the fiftieth anniversary of *Film Quarterly* (see the notice on the facing page).

⁂

Of the films I watched this quarter, I was particularly engaged by André Téchiné's new drama, a rumination on the nonconformity of life and art whose title seems to me to be provocative. *The Witnesses* has voiceover narration by Sarah (Emmanuelle Béart), a writer, and we discover that she is novelizing the death of the young man, Manu (Johan Libéreau), who has carried on an affair with her partner Mehdi (Sami Bouajila). When Mehdi discovers Sarah's project to, as she puts it, witness Manu's "time among us," he is furious. "You're stabbing me in the back!"

This imagined injury aside, what about Manu? We see him stricken by AIDS, progressively disfigured, enervated, slowly losing his life, but we do not see him die. On an evening walk with Adrien (Michel Blanc), he runs forward and the screen flares up to white. There is a cut to a shot of a wreathed coffin being driven through snowy country in a Combi van. Sarah's words fills in the gap: "At Manu's request, Adrien gave him a fatal dose of tranquilizers."

Manu's voice returns near the end of *The Witnesses*. It is a poignant moment: "I spent all my life in bushes, sau-

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Sarah (Emmanuelle Béart) in *The Witnesses* (2007). Courtesy Artificial Eye

nas and bars . . . You go where everybody's like you. Mehdi was the exception. That's why I loved him more. But did he ever love me?" The words are from a testamentary tape recording Manu has made. Sarah has used the recording for her story and now she is playing it back on a dictaphone as she sits thoughtfully by the bright sea in which she and her reassembled extended family will take a boat trip in the final scene.

One of the film's three intertitles reads "WAR / (Winter 1984–5)" and we may start to think that there is a conflict of voices in *The Witnesses*. Sarah's narration is interpretative and prone to jarring metaphorical flourishes. "For the first time he dreamed of being invisible," she declares, when what we have heard Manu say for himself on this subject, one troubled night when he inadvertently wakes his sister Julie (Julie Depardieu) in the small Paris hotel room they share, is that he has dreamed of drowning. Mehdi, an amateur pilot, takes Julie flying after Manu has gone. "Nobody down below saw them becoming angels," Sarah announces, using a stilted phrase that is oddly muddled and sentimental about death, as if dying were nothing, or just a pretext for the living to take some heavenly leisure. In Téchiné's exceptionally subtle but stinging film, the flowery narration is a paradoxical, unreliable testimony: it perhaps resembles that solar screen flare, which is an erasure not an elucidation.

Rob White

ANNIVERSARY FILM REVIEW PRIZE

$500 prize plus publication in the fiftieth-anniversary issue (Winter 2008–09) of *Film Quarterly*

Deadline for entries: 30 March 2008

For further details see the online Submissions Guidelines (now fully updated), FAQ page, www.filmquarterly.org

DREAM MACHINES

The climax of *Aliens* (James Cameron, 1986) pits the gooey, hyper-organic alien queen against Ripley, machined and metalized inside an exoskeletal powerloader. Victorious, she looks like a hybrid of a woman and the Eiffel Tower (perhaps that's always true of Sigourney Weaver). "Pretty good . . . for a human," says the wrecked android Bishop, dripping in irony and milky android blood.

The scene might as well be a schematic reduction of Donna Haraway's landmark essay, "A Cyborg Manifesto" (also from 1986: why, it's almost proof!) Originally a brief for a new feminism, the ideas in its wake—notably the "posthuman"—have flourished in the cool of cyberpunk intellectualism. Its wager, in the crudest terms, is that we're not biological beasties who *use* technology, but increasingly seamless hybrids. We're cyborgs; the future is now. Who could argue otherwise? How is someone with a hearing aid not the Bionic Woman, a soldier with Kevlar and night-scope not the Terminator? Was not the young Arnold himself, with his better-living-through-chemistry and his weaponized physique, already at the threshold of machine-life?

As such logic accompanies us futureward, earlier forms take on an increasingly nostalgic air. Quentin Tarantino's half of the *Grindhouse* resurrection conjures a 1970s Americana where the only way to live is in cars—like Gary Numan's song, but with more muscular vehicles and female banter. The film's ear for such talk being solid tin, the American heavy metal rolling through *Death Proof* (2006) takes on marquee importance; the '69 Dodge Charger and '70 Dodge Challenger should have gotten points on the gross. Several human characters are (and are played by) professional stunt artists, a craft which highlights the objectizing of bodies; the cars are obviously their next of kin. Though the film's lesson is brutal, the central stunt, known as "Ship's Mast" (wherein Zoe Bell straps herself to the windshield by means of Prada belts), seems to involve actually trying to have the same experience a car has, which is sort of sweet.

The "Ship's Mast" stunt in *Death Proof*. © 2007 The Weinstein Company. DVD: The Weinstein Company (U.S.)

Beyond such depictions, movies have a specific, privileged relation to the posthuman: they're made by cyborgs. The computer-guided operator socketed into a Steadicam rig isn't an innovation—merely a clarification of cinematography's historical form. Thus cinema's great affinity for video games, the other screen entertainment produced by fusing organism and apparatus. The man with a movie camera and the dude with a console are brothers.

Action films (even beyond game-based titles) continue to develop a narrative vocabulary borrowed directly from gaming: repetitive episodic challenges of intensifying difficulty replace the tidily coherent arc associated with the biological life story. This verges on the medieval; the structure of "levels" is as much *Divine Comedy* as *Halo*. Yet little of Dante's wandering motion survives in Hollywood, and there is no theology beyond victory; one feels the iron cadence stamping out scene after scene in, for example, *Resident Evil: Extinction* (Russell Mulcahy, 2007). This third iteration somewhat confusingly follows *Resident Evil: Apocalypse*: a terrific movie, but apparently an ineffective Armageddon. Former model Milla Jovovich continues her habit, perfected in *The Fifth Element* (Luc Besson, 1997), of playing more-than-human. She's the future in a red dress; the camera goggles at her like it's met its match. Insofar as there's a plot, the good guys impersonate the caravan from *The Road Warrior* (George Miller, 1981) while fleeing a zombie plague for the Alaska territories, as yet uncontaminated. They're bound for the past, the human, though they don't get much farther than the historyless city of Las Vegas. Meanwhile, the Umbrella Corporation clutches at the reins of the future, scheming to turn the feral zombies biddable. A suit notes the potential value of "docile workers," but the requisite evil doctor prefers to convert them into a hyper-aggressive army.

Laborers, soldiers: for serviceable flesh, these are the choices on offer. There is a historical logic to this, of course. Factory floor and firing line are the twin crucibles where

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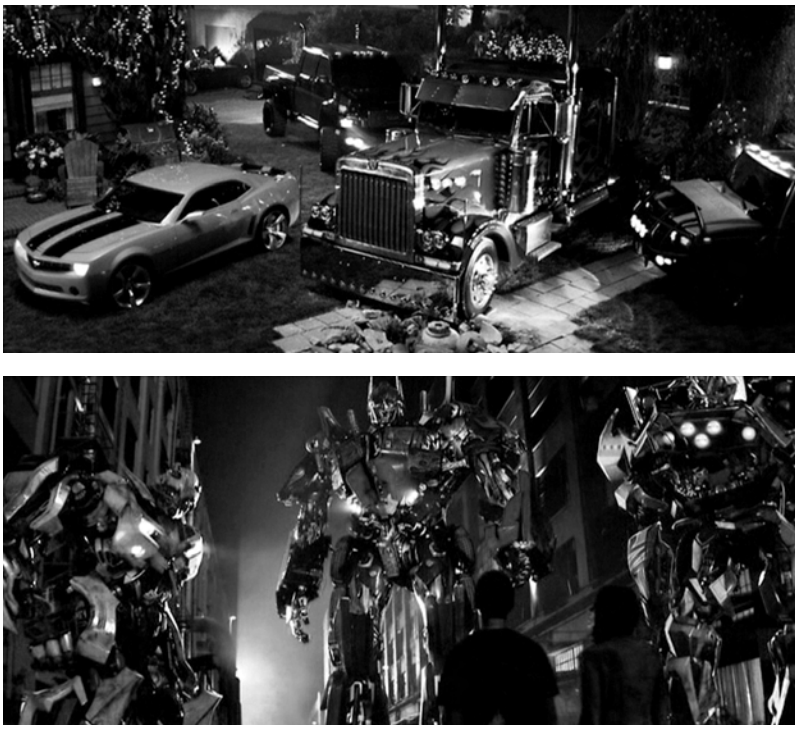
human and machine are conjoined; not by chance does Ripley in *Aliens* discover the clanking industrial aid is equally well-suited to killing. One might argue that the posthuman begins before the actual melding—at the moment the body is first made to move to a machine's metre. Riefenstahl's soldiers, Ford's plant workers: here is the kernel of the idea. Just saying so clarifies certain things. This is the structure of the video-game narrative for which the dream factories have started to retool: serial combat set to the mechanical rhythm of the assembly line.

The machine-body must have been on Walter Benjamin's mind in 1936, when he proclaimed film the great art of modernity, of the age of mechanical reproduction. But he also intended that film equipment allowed a new form of hyper-vision, beyond mere human perception: a "thoroughgoing permeation of reality with mechanical equipment." He meant bullet time and the like, before which even natural processes can be seen at a depth of detail which paradoxically renders them artificial: "The sight of immediate reality has become an orchid in the land of technology." The camera and the edit make us all cyborgs of the eye.

This offers the temptation to look at things that can't be seen; to look *inside* things. Hence the most shocking moment of *Transformers* (Michael Bay, 2007). The film, like the toys and cartoons preceding, features a galactic struggle between good Autobots and evil Decepticons, both capable of transforming between humanoid and machine aspects. The conflict has come to earth and gathered up some hapless humans: soldiers, models, Shia LaBeouf. During the epic finale of urban conflict, there's a brief "shot" of the late-arriving Decepticon, Starscream (in his mechanical form as a jet) smashing into and blurring through an office tower. We watch from a magical viewpoint, mid-air outside the office windows; the windows spool past like frames of celluloid. They reveal the interior stuff with impossible detail: desks, fluttering papers, bodies being tossed asunder, before Starscream blasts out the building, leaving a defined exit wound.

The sequence lasts less than two seconds. Yet it's by far the most detailed reconstruction of what was hidden from our human eyes within the spectacularly visible violence of September 11, 2001. At the same time, it gets at the kernel of truth within the Transformers franchise (and the timeliness of this restoration). No other device so lovingly preserves the boy's dream that every single object in the world is a weapon: cars, planes, bodies. Car bomb, 9/11, suicide bomber: the fantasy of weaponization is merely the reality of asymmetric warfare, and the story of how it was finally brought to the United States. The movie really should be titled *Transformers, or a Brief History of 21st Century Combat*. Square-jawed officer Josh Duhamel's one task in the film is to deliver the news to our just-a-boy hero: "we're all soldiers now."



Autobots as cars and humanoid mech warriors in *Transformers*. © 2007 DreamWorks LLC, Paramount Pictures Corporation. DVD: DreamWorks Home Entertainment (U.S.)

If there is anything peculiar to this insight, it's the abandoning of humanist cant in which heroes are true individuals, fighting the inhuman ideological mass of the enemy (naturally, each side tends to claim this position for themselves). *Transformers* identifies a world where that opposition collapses in the confluence of total mechanization and total militarization *for all sides*. Everyone's an interchangeable part stamped out by historical necessity.

Such a world view may be endemic to a film starring *models* rather than individuals. Many of the models are cars; every vehicle that appears, including the Autobots but also siding with the villains, is from General Motors. This is not quite the nostalgia of *Death Proof*. It does however summon the era in which all cars in America were American cars—which is to say, the great epoch of U.S. factory industrialism, which just happens to be congruent with the ascent of U.S. empire. This is the film's reasoning, strange and impeccable. In trying to think about the posthuman future, *Transformers* can't help summoning the dawn of the posthuman past: a vision in which universal conscription and the invention of the assembly line are the selfsame fact, Napoleon and Henry Ford a singular individual priming the motor of our history.

JOSHUA CLOVER is the author of *The Matrix* (BFI Modern Classics, 2004).

A BACKLOT IN BULGARIA

When Hurricane Katrina hit Louisiana, *The Guardian* (2006), a film about Coast Guard rescue workers set in North Carolina and Alaska, was preparing to shoot there. Was it some eerie coincidence that this Coast Guard rescue movie had picked Louisiana? Hardly. It is just less expensive to build a wave tank there than in Los Angeles.

In Hollywood, the term "runaway production" describes any film that, for economic reasons, shoots outside of Los Angeles, resulting in a net loss to the L.A.-based motion picture industry. It is a topic that is often bitterly discussed by members of local unions and guilds whose wage protections now make them unaffordable in a global labor pool.

At first, productions did not run far. As the U.S. is the only western nation without a federal film commission, state film commissions compete against each other to offer the most appealing tax incentives. In 2002, I scouted New Mexico for my film *11:14* (2003). The state was offering no-interest five-year loans of up to $7.5 million, as long as filming was done there and sixty percent of the crew were state residents. The only reason we did not shoot there was that New Mexico's plan was so appealing that the entire local crew base had already been used up. Instead we filmed in L.A. and I simply framed out the palm trees. I did not realize then what an unusual opportunity this was. Making movies in L.A., once the cheapest and easiest place to film, is today a luxury. California has passed no tax incentives for filming, with the result that each year fewer films shoot in the state, while New Mexico, which went from zero to twenty movies in two years, passed more tax breaks in 2005 and even raised its loan amount to $15 million.

Still, regardless of state competition, all domestic productions support the U.S. motion picture industry. But in the 1990s Vancouver and Toronto emerged as major production centers; Canada, with its favorable exchange rate and English-speaking crews, became the center of runaway production. Anti-Canadian bumper stickers became common on the cars of L.A. craftspeople and technicians whose jobs had been outsourced north. But this anger already seems quaint: Canada has unions too and there are only modest savings to be made by comparison with Eastern Europe, where American production is now booming.

In the early 2000s films began migrating first to the Czech Republic and then, as the expanding European Union raised costs, further east into Romania. When I was hired to direct my current film, it had already been decided that we would shoot in Bulgaria, where low wages, cheap hotels, and an advantageous exchange rate meant that with the same budget we could shoot up to three times longer than we could in the United States. It is conceivable that a city in Eastern Europe today could become what L.A. was at the beginning of the twentieth century: a huge backlot for studios. As a result L.A., and the studios themselves, may be on the way to becoming a financial, planning, and marketing center rather than the place where movies are physically made.

Of course, filming in Eastern Europe is not without its problems. Producers grumble about thresholds of diminishing returns, hidden costs, and in certain cases the need to train local crews to Hollywood standards. But then no place is perfect. When Cecil B. DeMille made *The Squaw Man* (1914), Hollywood's first feature film, he had to ride a horse to work and carry a pistol to shoot rattlesnakes. Filmmakers are used to overcoming obstacles, especially when the price is right. The trend toward foreign production shows no sign of slowing and in a few years it may no longer involve Eastern Europe. Who knows where I might scout my next film?

A Sofia intersection, scene of a car crash, doubling for Prague. Photo: Simon Varsano

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On location in Prague: art director Giovanni Natalluci (left) and director Greg Marcks.

Photo: Yuval Lotem

Productions will continue to gravitate toward the most inexpensive places until there is a compelling financial reason for them not to, even if it means dealing with the occasional hurricane.

The difficulty for storytellers is that this economic imperative precedes and often supersedes creative decisions. This has mostly been presented in negative terms, with filmmakers lamenting that it is too expensive to shoot American movies in the locations where the stories actually take place. Thus *Brokeback Mountain* (2005), a story of American cowboys in Wyoming, was filmed in British Columbia. *Superman Returns* (2006) was shot mainly in Australia. And *Cold Mountain* (2003), set in North Carolina during the American Civil War, was filmed in Romania.

It is a fool's errand to try to make Mozambique look like Manhattan, yet this is essentially the conundrum filmmakers are struggling with as shooting locations bear less and less resemblance to story locations. But the problem does have a flipside. Filmmakers can now tell stories about places they previously could not afford. Overseas shooting on location, once the sole domain of big budget movies, is now an economic necessity for smaller productions as well. If Hollywood stories can incorporate these locations instead of merely exploiting them, the American cinema will become richer. The only question is whether audiences will be interested in stories set in other countries, but given the global nature of the film industry today I believe they will be. Perhaps this economic model will even allow a new genre to develop, one of Americans traveling abroad, making a virtue of the same necessity that once favored the cheap production of Westerns in the arid scrubland of Southern California.

My current film, an international thriller, has story locations in Bangkok, Prague, Moscow, and Omaha, Nebraska. Excluding some exterior location photography, we are filming mainly in Sofia, both on a soundstage and on similar locations. (While I had initially hoped to change one of the story locations to our actual shooting location, Sofia is not exactly an escapist fantasy destination.) Our challenge will be to sell the city's housing as Moscow, its nearby plains as Nebraska, and its cobblestoned streets as Prague. But at least on this film there are no palm trees to frame out.

GREG MARCKS is a director and screenwriter based in Los Angeles.

TREASURES III: SOCIAL ISSUES IN AMERICAN FILM, 1900–1934

JOAN MELLEN EXTOLS A BOXED SET OF FILMS FROM A MORE HOPEFUL TIME

The vanished Progressive era in American history is recreated forcefully in the new National Film Preservation Foundation's set bearing the subtitle, *Movies That Helped Change America*. If the claim that films effect social change may be as quixotic as the very term "progressivism," these four DVDs, "The City Reformed"; "New Women"; "Toil and Tyranny"; and "Americans In The Making" chronicle with a startling honesty the faultlines of American society already apparent in the first three decades of the twentieth century.

This handsomely packaged set is accompanied by an indispensable 173-page booklet of "program notes" by Scott Simmon. It includes as well notes by music curator Martin Marks (each film has been provided with a new musical track). This volume adds valuable historical information to supplement the films' commentaries (which work best when they are by social historians). The set contains forty-eight films in all, from stop-motion animated cartoons to Cecil B. DeMille's 128-minute *The Godless Girl* (1928), artistically the most accomplished work included.

This collection might form the heart of a course on American silent film. It is no less appropriate for a general audience, opening a window onto an era when it seemed possible for citizens to shape the direction of their country. All the films, regardless of their ideological bent, begin from the premise that the future will be more just and more hospitable to ordinary people than the past. It was felicitous for the Progressive era in America that its idealism was met by the birth of the great American art form, that cinema was available as a venue where social conflicts could be dramatized and debated, and contending political philosophies be granted each a fair hearing.

Indeed, an abundance of political perspectives enliven the collection. There are pro-suffrage and anti-suffrage films. Company films, several sponsored by the National Association of Manufacturers, decry the need for unions, while union-sponsored films dramatize that only by organizing can workers languishing helplessly on inhuman assembly lines hope to free themselves from brutal exploitation.

Not every issue is represented fairly. There is a clutch of films urging what must have been a dubious audience to support America's entry into World War I, and to finance its aftermath. An ugly cartoon produced by the Ford Motor Company, called *The United Snakes of America* (c. 1917), vilifies those who opposed military intervention. Mary Pickford herself in *100% American* (1918) urges that people sacrifice all luxuries to purchase Liberty Bonds. There are no anti-war films in this collection, and the only signal that anyone had doubt about this military adventure is the brief depiction of a "Peace Society" in King Vidor's *Bud's Recruit* (1918); its participants are confused, heavy-set, middle-aged busybodies.

In contrast to the chauvinism and anti-union theme, the collection also includes the brilliant *Redskin* (1929), a full-length feature entirely from the point of view of the Native American characters, depicting their predicament and excoriating the racism visited relentlessly upon them. The inclusion of this film is inspired, and it is only to be regretted that it is not accompanied by a film acknowledging the racism and injustice confronting African Americans.

THE HUMAN COST

Whatever the tacked-on ending or the reformist solutions, film after film reveals America as a society riddled with contradictions, a social order that nurtures deep-seated evils. The Draconian orphanage in which Ed Simmons is deposited in the full-length *The Soul of Youth* (1920) is depicted in grim detail. Hapless children are lodged in a noisy venue of neglect; close to starvation, a toddler steals repeatedly the cheese out of the mousetraps. Not a moment of tenderness intrudes in these lengthy sequences. That children are homeless on the streets of America's cities is treated in *The Soul of Youth* not as an anomaly, but as the rule. Denver

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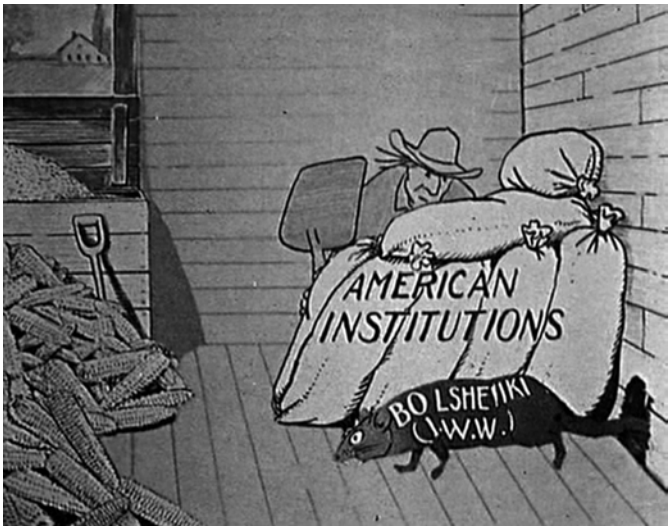
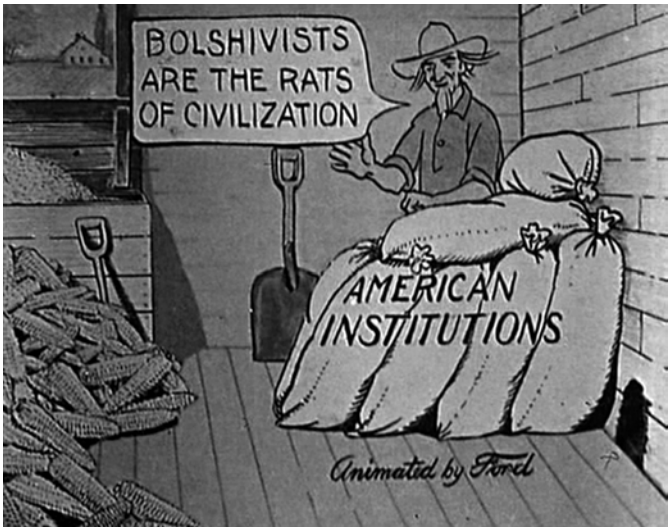
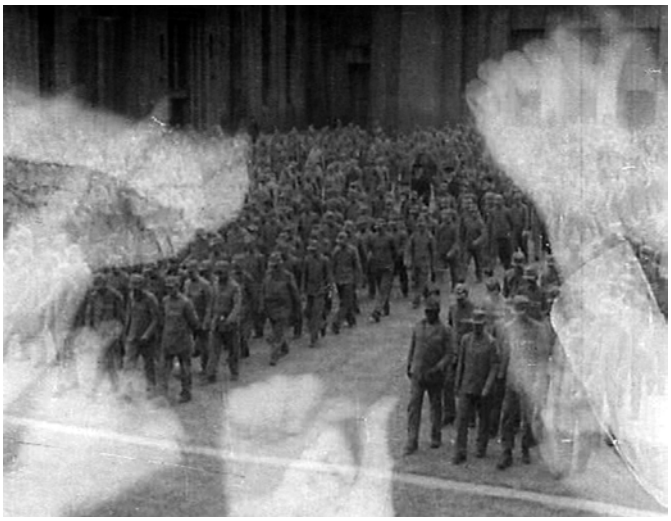
A RANGE OF POLITICAL PERSPECTIVES FROM THE PROGRESSIVE ERA







Top: *Uncle Sam and the Bolsheviki-I.W.W. Rat* (c. 1919).
Middle: *The Voice of the Violin* (1909, left), *A Call for Help from Sing Sing!* (1934).
Bottom: *A Suffragette in Spite of Himself* (1912, left), *On to Washington* (1913).

Juvenile Court Judge Ben B. Lindsey, who plays himself in the film, dispenses, appropriately, mercy rather than justice. For this collection, Judge Lindsey serves as the quintessential reformer, assuming the obligation of redressing rather than containing social ills.

America may have been verging on historically unprecedented prosperity, but many of these films focus on the human cost. *Labor's Reward* (1925), its title ironic, begins with an exhausted woman collapsing at a factory machine. *Manhattan Trade School for Girls* (1911) admits that child labor, especially of girls, is so endemic in urban America that it is preferable for the children to be removed from elementary school to an industrial environment where they could at least learn to make dress patterns or manufacture straw hats and novelty boxes.

Several of these films, while acknowledging the inhumanity of factory work, insist that the corporations and bosses will police themselves, as in the U.S. Steel Corporation's *The Making of an American* (1913). A quick succession of shots of a variety of safety devices suggests by default the dangers to which the worker was subject, while suggesting not so subtly that the company has reformed itself, without the assistance of unions. The last sequence depicts a company school and a company playground, images of benevolent corporate paternalism. The same theme emerges in *The Usurer's Grip* (1913) where a kindly employer saves a young family from the ruin of debt with the risible advice that the husband put money regularly into a savings account.

Whatever the tacked-on ending or the reformist solutions, film after film reveals America as a society riddled with contradictions, a social order that nurtures deep-seated evils.

The most powerful of the films depict the evils of institutions without resort to easy palliatives. By far the strongest social statement emerges in *The Godless Girl*, DeMille's last silent feature. Its accomplishment is apparent in the shooting of a riot near the beginning, for which DeMille built, as Simmon notes, "a moveable camera platform that utilized a traveling elevator cage suspended from an overhead monorail." Extreme close-ups, including of the atheist manual, are intercut with wide shots exploring in deep focus several planes of characters in motion, shots that foreshadow DeMille epics to come. The entire variation of shots and angles in the magnificent sequence early on where the believers and the atheists engage in hand-to-hand combat offers a virtual clinic in the techniques available to this new medium.

Bob and Judy, the main characters in *The Godless Girl*, wind up in a reformatory that is part Dickens, part Abu Ghraib. In an extraordinary scene, "The Brute," the leader of the prison guards played by Noah Beery to perfection, hoses Bob down in a long take that seems never to end. Electric torture follows. DeMille never minimizes the evil he is exposing in this depiction of a reformatory housing adolescent "criminals" that is more maximum-security prison than an institution for juvenile offenders. Beery underplays his role, adding complexity to what might otherwise have been a predictable melodramatic performance. This is great and utterly credible acting.

INJUSTICE AND ACTIVISM

As these films move toward the moment of the Great Depression, poverty invades the mise-en-scène increasingly. The best example is *Who Pays?* (1915), the final episode of a *Toil and Tyranny* serial made two years before the International Workers of the World (IWW, also known as the "Wobblies") organized the lumber industry in the Pacific Northwest, as the helpful commentary clarifies. Through intercutting, *Who Pays?* alternates between the mind-numbing poverty of worker Karl Hurd (played by Henry King, later to become a major Hollywood director) and the ostentatious luxury of his "lumber king" boss. What is dramatized powerfully is that class inequality is not merely intolerable, but will result in individual and collective disaster.

By the end, Karl, bent on murdering his boss, has mistakenly shot the lumber boss's well-meaning daughter instead. Everyone pays: the boss who keeps his workers at starvation wages, refusing to pay for overtime and driving them ruthlessly to violence and mayhem, and the worker whose fate is disease and starvation. Yet despite this seemingly "balanced" ending, what the images make clear is that the entire economic configuration is unwholesome, that it is untenable for a few to feast in splendor, served by men in livery, while the poor cough their way to early death.

Society had a responsibility to eradicate such imbalances, and injustice was unlikely to be redressed through the good will of the powerful: these ideas dominate the collection, even as several of the films excoriate radical solutions. Some of the films reflect the "Red Scare" of the times, the raids of Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer (endorsed by a young John Edgar Hoover); these include the anti-IWW animated cartoon, *Uncle Sam and the Bolsheviki-I.W.W. Rat* (1919), where a long-nosed rodent invades the storehouse of "American Institutions." The rat nibbles on an ear of corn only for Uncle Sam, dressed as a farmer, to grab a shovel,

The Godless Girl (1928): Noah Beery as the sadistic head prison guard.

and smash the rat over the head until he is dead. Then Uncle Sam tosses the rat's corpse out of a window. The producer of this anti-union red-baiting propaganda was the Ford Motor Company.

Only slightly more subtle is D. W. Griffith's anti-progressive, *Voice of the Violin* (1909). A music teacher is courted by Anarchists and Marxists (the two groups are conflated) wearing black robes, predecessors of Griffith's white-robed Klansmen of *The Birth of a Nation* (1915). The capitalist father of the violin student, dressed in a fur coat, and with the capitalist's signature top hat, acquiesces in her relationship with the impoverished musician, solving thereby the dilemma of economic inequality: no revolutionaries need apply.

Yet even Griffith had to acknowledge the social unrest of the day. The rationalization that the rich, sharing their wealth, would eliminate the necessity for institutional change, gnaws at several of the films, not only in *Voice of the Violin* but also in *From "The Submerged"* (1912), an eleven-minute short in which a rich swell first distributes coins to men on a bread line and then marries a destitute woman at film's end. As Scott Simmon points out, "the submerged" was a Progressive-era euphemism for the poor.

The neatness of such endings notwithstanding, many of these films are too honest not to confront the class divide. In a 1934 Heart Movietone News segment, *A Call for Help from Sing Sing!* the warden, speaking into the camera, suggests that crime is the result of unemployment and hard times, and not endemic to working people. The outstretched arms of hitchhikers are superimposed over the yard at Sing Sing prison where legions of high school and college graduates, all white, have been incarcerated as outcasts, consigned to oblivion by an uncaring society. This newsreel segment sympathizes entirely with those driven to crime by hard times.

The theme that mass action alone can combat injustice effectively is expressed in a marvelous eighty-second film called *On to Washington* (1913). This film commemorates a walk from Newark, New Jersey to Washington, D.C. undertaken by twelve suffragettes. In the single most moving shot in the entire collection, a close shot, the two leaders of the march sit facing the camera. One, Rosalie Jones, stands alongside a wagon. A socialite, Jones would go on to earn a doctorate of law. Seated in the wagon is the longtime suffragette leader, Elisabeth Freeman, dressed as a gypsy.

Stationary as they are in the shot, the women appear as utterly heroic. They smile slightly, confident that history is on their side. Their gaze is so intent, so unflinching, that it seems as if they are challenging the spectator directly to take up the cause.

NEW WOMEN

Jones and Freeman are two of the "New Women" whose presence and images grace this collection. That women work, need to work, and are expected to work is a premise so obvious that it is treated by the directors in a matter-of-fact manner. As in life, so in these films, women earn their own livings. Often they labor in stifling factories, as in *The Crime of Carelessness* (1912), a film made in response to the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire of the preceding year. Some of the strong women in these films support hapless, ill, or just-plain-slacker fathers who are unable to care for their families, as poor, self-sacrificing Mary does in *The Courage of the Commonplace* (1913).

Rare for American cinema to come, women in these films are depicted frequently as people of intellect and ideas. So, inspired by his longtime screenwriter Jeanie Macpherson, DeMille in *The Godless Girl* places a heroine at the center of the conflict as the leader of the "Godless Society." Although she is only in high school, Judy is presented as a mature working woman, in white collar and cuffs, the signature cloche hat of the fashionable 1920s, and high heels. Her life is devoted to ideas, as she debates Bible-thumping Bob on the value of religion.

Unlike later images to originate in Hollywood, the intellectual woman in *The Godless Girl* does not lack in femininity. There is even a surprising nude scene (if in long shot) where Judy, her white skin luminous, cavorts with pleasure at a stream. Her sensuality is unmediated either by her intellectuality, or even by the fact that she and Bob are on the run from the prison authorities.

As part of their depiction of women, these films sometimes even transcend class barriers. The perky little maid in *A Suffragette in Spite of Himself* (1912) steals the film. In the last shot, having been fired (but so what!), she peeps laughing through the window as the intransigent man of the house unfolds a scroll she had left behind. It reads: "Votes For Women." She may be a maid, but the last word is hers.

The award for the most charming image of a woman in the collection, however, must go to *The Hazards of Helen* (1915), an episode in a railroad series. This one is called "The Escape on the Fast Freight" and introduces Helen, a working woman who is as feminine as Mary Pickford herself, but as athletic as Tom Mix (she sports her own version of Pickford's blonde ringlets, and a bright ribbon in her hair, while her white blouse and dark skirt convey her status as a working woman). Indeed, Helen is a night operator handling the Wells Fargo shipments of hard cash. Robbed by two tramps, she is locked into a closet. Fired, she dons a fluffy

Top: *The Hazards of Helen*: "The Escape on the Fast Freight" (1915).
Bottom: *Where Are My Children?* (1916, left), *Kansas Saloon Smashers* (1901).

white hat, and, leaving the ineffectual constable in her dust, goes off to apprehend the thieves on her own.

The signature shot of the film depicts Helen in long shot lowering herself by a rope from a high bridge onto a moving freight train. As competent a figure as any in the silent cinema, male or female, Helen then tackles one of the hombres and brings him to justice. Ironically enough, Helen Holmes, the actress who played Helen, took over the directing duties for this episode when the director was in hospital, although her name does not appear as co-director in the title cards.

In the curious two-minute film *Offers Herself as Bride for $10,000* (1931), a pretty blonde named Mary Clowes explains to a journalist that she had placed a newspaper advertisement for a husband who would provide $10,000 so that she could buy her indigent parents a "small farming home." Simmon's book is indispensable here, revealing what the film omits: having been beset by "Depression deadbeats," Mary received three job offers, enabling her to support her parents on her own.

Not all the films on the "New Women" disc depict strong, intelligent, or admirable women. The film most insulting to women, most retrograde, was the one directed by the leading woman director of the day, Lois Weber, who was also the highest-paid director, male or female. In *Where Are My Children?* (1916), Weber depicts poor women as hapless and helpless, one step from suicide when pregnancy threatens, while rich women, universally, abort their children out of the selfish desire to be unimpeded in their quest for pleasure. None of them has ever heard of Margaret Sanger, although Lois Weber certainly had.

A Victorian smugness pervades *Where Are My Children?* not least in its heavy-handed framing device. Behind gold portals of an obvious painted set, babies with angels' wings hover waiting to be born. Those aborted fly back to heaven, the gates closing behind them. Weber's message appears to be that rich women should bear children (the idea of sexuality as independent of procreation is foreign to this film, although not to the Progressive era), while the poor would do best to abstain.

Where Are My Children? excoriates both birth control and abortion as if these were one and the same. In despair, the DVD commentator and Simmon both can only point out that Weber did better with her later film, *The Hand That Rocks the Cradle*, made in 1917, only a year later. *Where Are My Children?* shares a disdain for the female sex also exhibited in such curiosities as *Kansas Saloon Smashers* (1901) where prohibitionist-minded women, fat and garbed in black as if they were birds of prey, wreck a saloon, or in *Why Mr. Nation Wants a Divorce* (1901) and *A Lively Affair* (c. 1912) with their strident message that woman's place is in the home.

REDSKIN

Given the stereotypic image of the Native American as a crazed, whooping maniac with feathers in his hair and murderous revenge on his mind, an image that for decades dominated American cinema, *Redskin*, the fourth full-length feature in this collection, comes as a revelation.

Shot in authentic Navajo and Pueblo locations in Arizona and Western New Mexico, as well as at actual Indian Schools, *Redskin* is also notable for being among the first films shot in partial Technicolor. To achieve what was called the "two-color Technicolor effect," the heavy Mitchell cameras, as Simmon explains, "captured light thorough a beam-soliciting prism and two filters onto a double-length black and white negative." The color film recorded two frames for each image taken by the black-and-white camera. Red, brown, and green dominate. Blue is the missing color, but blue skies would have been antithetical to the grim story being recounted here. Though it was praised at the time, after the advent of sound, and with the habitual stereotyping of the Native American, *Redskin* was largely forgotten.

That the hero, Wing Foot, a Navajo graduate of the inhuman Indian Schools, is played by a white man, Richard Dix, and that the Chahi, or Medicine Man, is played by one Bernard Siegel, does not undermine the film's integrity. *Redskin* was, as Simmon notes, "almost the last Hollywood feature for twenty years to take a sympathetic look into Native American life." The film does more than that. Included in the "Americans In The Making" category, this feature alone explores with depth what it means to be an American, and what values an American should embrace.

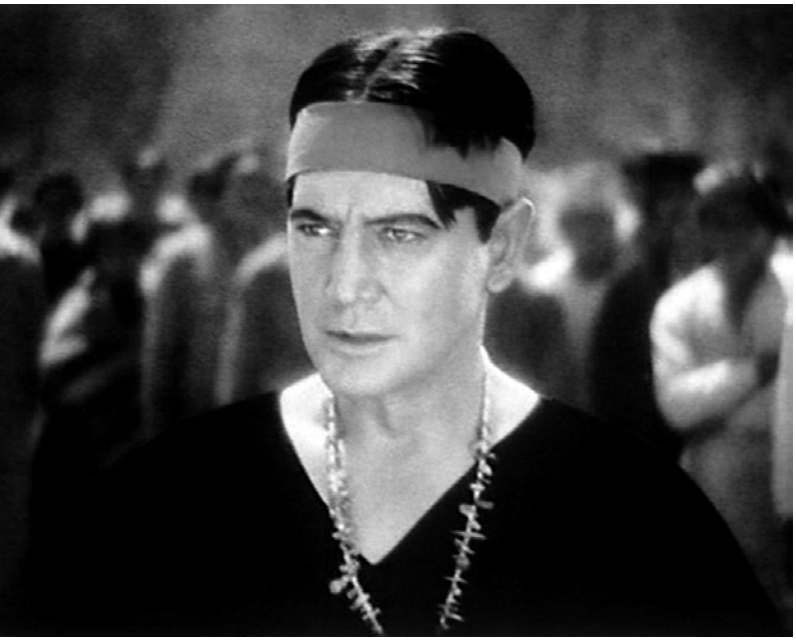
Director Victor Schertzinger, and his screenwriter Elizabeth Pickett, who wrote the original novel, *Navajo*, endorse immediately Indian over white American culture. The scenes shot in Native American communities, Navajo or Pueblo, are shot in color, red predominating and displaying a profusion of Indian arts and craft. When Wing Foot is kidnapped by the Indian agent and must leave his home for the world of the white man, the film reverts to a dull amber-tinted black-and-white, reflecting the lesser values and inhumanity of white America.

At once *Redskin* explodes the fantasy of assimilation no less than the fiction of America as a "melting pot" where, sooner or later, life will commence for all from a level playing field. That Wing Foot is intelligent, forceful, a consummate athlete, and a loyal and honorable human being affords him no advantage in white society. When he protests against its racism, his white sponsors inform him that he would never have been awarded a scholarship to their university had he not been a track star.

Credit and the triumph at the end belong entirely to Wing Foot, whose rejection of materialism and personal gain asserts the values of the lost America this collection recaptures and commemorates.

Redskin portrays the Native American as a person equally at home in a tuxedo as in traditional Navajo dress, stereotype-exploding imagery. With ease, Wing Foot navigates telephones, trains, and automobiles. He speaks perfect English when he so chooses. Reason rather than violence is his preferred mode of being, and if he holds a rifle in several shots, he manages never to fire it. Without the sentimentality of *Ramona: A Story of the White Man's Injustice to the Indian* (1910) directed by Griffith, and on the same disc, *Redskin* narrates its story of injustice without plunging Native American victims into lugubrious passivity.

The *deus ex machina* of Wing Foot's discovery of oil at the end of the film is not as unrealistic as it might appear. He must still combat greedy white men, ubiquitous already in the West, and determined to steal his claim. The ending has Wing Foot triumph and marry Corn Blossom, the Pueblo woman he loves, not because he has become rich through



Two contrasting worlds in *Redskin* (1929).

the accident of oil, but out of his own staunch and unwavering character. That oil would be the wellspring of American globalism suggests further evidence of the political sophistication of this film.

Wing Foot chooses to keep none of this oil for himself in a transcendently progressive close. Half will go to his own people, the other to the Pueblos. Community trumps self and selfishness; personal gain recedes before the well-being of the group. Wing Foot has been aided by his white teacher, who informs her Indian Agent suitor, "We'll never find our happiness unless we help them find theirs," a Debsian sentiment.

Credit and the triumph at the end belong entirely to Wing Foot, whose rejection of materialism and personal gain asserts the values of the lost America this collection recaptures and commemorates. Made without hesitation, his decision to place the needs of his people before his own personal advantage measures the distance between the Progressive era's confidence that injustice can be righted and today's entropic despair that things can ever be other than as they are now.

JOAN MELLEN is the author of many books, among them *The Waves at Genji's Door: Japan Through Its Cinema* (Pantheon, 1976) and *A Farewell to Justice: Jim Garrison, JFK's Assassination and the Case that Should Have Changed History* (Potomac Books, 2005).

ABSTRACT This review essay of a National Film Preservation Foundation archival DVD boxed set of fiction and non-fiction films from the Progressive era emphasizes the underlying optimism about the future that is discernible even in those films that treat harrowing subjects (such as social deprivation, violence, and industrial exploitation).

KEYWORDS silent film, Progressive era, suffragettes, non-fiction film, Native Americans

DVD DATA *Treasures III: Social Issues in American Film, 1900–1934*. Various directors. Curated by Scott Simmon. Music curated by Martin Marks. © 2007 National Film Preservation Foundation. $89.99, 5 discs.

SICKO

ERNEST CALLENBACH APPLAUDS A WITTY DOCUMENTARY BROADSIDE

Even people who might prefer to have a beer with George Bush rather than Michael Moore recognize that Moore has powerfully changed the rules of the documentary game. His films are dramas, not lectures—though they contain mini-lectures in the margin or in voiceover. In the grand perspective of documentary history, Moore has taken to heart the theoretical critique that in traditional docs the Voice-of-God narrator is invisible, inscrutable, and therefore incurably unreliable, and he has done what some theorists (and ethnographic filmmakers) suggest: make the narrator/filmmaker visible as well as audible. Better yet, make him Amurrican-style overweight, resolutely unchic, and mouthy—absolutely abjuring the policy-wonk stance!

This is a capital invention, and surely responsible in great measure for the enormous success that Moore's films have enjoyed in theaters—some months back, *Sicko* was the fifth-highest-grossing documentary of all time. Love him or loathe him, you have to deal with Michael Moore. He relishes playing an ungainly hero who stands in for all of us who are exploited, preyed-upon, mocked—in biblical language, "despised." It is he, personally and inimitably, who challenges the big dragons, from General Motors to the U.S. government. (Not an easy act for others to follow; most of the documentarists who have recently been aiming at theatrical release have stuck to the standard formula of interviews interspersed with supposedly telling footage—the most notable exception being *Super Size Me* in 2004.)

As many other commentators have observed, *Sicko* is a huge baggy monster of a film, shot and edited in a rough-and-ready style. In our national battle of duelling anecdotes, Moore is a lethal competitor. Through a richly miscellaneous collection of scenes in which Moore interviews both Americans and citizens of other countries, *Sicko* resolutely raises awkward, indeed agonizing questions about why America has health statistics far below those of other industrialized countries—and why even those Americans who manage to cling to some kind of health insurance are treated so meanly. With him, as he is visibly shaken by the enormous and shocking contrasts, we talk to Canadians, French citizens, American expatriates living in France, Britons, Cubans. With him, we experience a sharp sense of amazement at the disparity between their experiences and the American norm. (Only one of his cases seems weak: a woman who called an ambulance that took her sick daughter not to the Kaiser Permanente hospital of her health program, but to another hospital which fatally denied her care—but we never grasp whether the fault lay with the ambulance company or the woman.)

Another powerful appeal in Moore's films is that he is funny, in a down-home way. He's not urbanely ironic in the manner of Jon Stewart or Bill Maher, but he loves jokes. Here he passes on the URL hook-a-canuck.com, for people who want to marry a Canadian in order to get good health coverage. (It's actually a list of dating services.) Or finally he discovers in a British hospital corridor a "CASHIER" window, which he pretends to suppose is the hidden flaw in the British free health service—except that it turns out to be a window that gives away money instead of taking it: it reimburses patients for travel to the hospital.

Sicko enters the public arena at what is paradoxically a politically rather promising time, when a huge new cohort of Americans are aging and realizing their vulnerability within a sick medical system. A lot of these aging (and voting) folks are also aware that common knee-jerk views about what government programs can or cannot do are unfounded. In their experience, Social Security is a lean, efficient, and cost-effective way of keeping them (as it has kept their parents) from dire poverty. Medicare, those over sixty-five know, provides a reasonably sturdy defense against most of their medical ills. Opponents of universal healthcare never bring up Medicare or Social Security, preferring to prate about government's incompetence in running the Post Office; they con-

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Sicko: Michael Moore is impressed by a French doctor's testimony about the national health plan. Photo: TWC 2007

ceal the fact that, aside from Canada, American medical waiting times are the longest of any advanced country. People living in the real world, however, recognize that the Post Office now works pretty well, along with other "socialized" institutions like libraries, police, and fire departments. They may even suspect (rightly) that a tax-supported medical system would be cheaper overall than the present profit-driven hodgepodge. And when seasoned travelers recount their healthcare experiences abroad, as a travel columnist recently asked them to do, the result is a flood of praise for government-run health services.

But Americans under sixty-five, even those lucky enough to have some kind of insurance, are gravely at risk. They are the justly worried folks *Sicko* concentrates on—not the forty million uninsured whom George Bush cheerily consigns to the emergency rooms.

Moore, I'm sure, never heard of an article that I contributed to this magazine in its early years, called "The Understood Antagonist and Other Observations"—a piece arguing that any powerful documentary has some kind of conflict structure, often covert, rather than relying on viewer curiosity or intellectual interest. Moore instinctively goes for confrontation and astonishment. But his antagonist is actually not easy to spot. *Sicko* gives us a capsule history of the Nixon-era machinations that led to the HMO- and insurer-dominated medical system. Yet we gradually come to understand that Moore's understood antagonist is not profit-crazed Big Pharma or payout-phobic insurance corporations, or heartless doctors, or even HMO professional gatekeepers required to meet a quota of denials (one of whom confesses to a committee on camera), but the whole social system, of which our enormous dysfunctional medical industry is only one part. This is probably why Moore spends so much screen time on Cuba: to him, it offers a general alternative to heartless capitalism. At first one is tempted to say that Moore simply can't resist aiming at maximum outrage. He takes a group of responders from 9/11, whose consequent health problems have not been resolved, on a boat ride to Guantánamo—in search of the allegedly excellent healthcare provided to the U.S. prisoners there. Ignored, he and his motley band resort to spiffy medical facilities in Havana, where they are treated with sophisticated medical technology, caring attention, and drugs costing pennies which in NYC cost hundreds of dollars. In narration-over, Moore points out that even poverty-stricken Cuba has health statistics better than ours.

Sicko brings in statistics where they are useful to shock, but Moore's focus is always on personal stories—not so much his own this time. He is a provocateur, an interventionist; his business is to inspire people to think about alternatives, and thus push politicians to do some new thinking too. One of

Moore's allies in this is Tony Benn, an ardent and eloquent British left-Labor MP, who is interviewed at length. Benn lived through the setting up of the National Health Service in post-World War II Britain, and argues cheerfully to Moore that the cure for despicable healthcare must lie in more democracy.

Like Benn, Moore is not a fatalist. He does not concede that America, as some wit put it, is the only country ever to move from savagery to barbarism without passing through civilization. He thinks, like another populist documentarian who deals with a wide range of social issues, Bill Moyers, that the American people have the capacity to take care of each other through government. If the Canadians and British and French and even Cubans can do it, why can't we?

Another powerful appeal in Moore's films is that he is funny, in a down-home way. He's not urbanely ironic in the manner of Jon Stewart or Bill Maher, but he loves jokes.

Well, do we still have enough democracy to bring it off? To most analysts of American policy-making, the odds for ever having a rational national health system here seem miniscule. (A French doctor dismisses Moore's question whether it's likely with a curt "No.") In the California legislature one health bill out of the three being presently considered proposes something like Medicare-for-all, which might satisfy Moore, but its legislative prospects look bleak. Nonetheless, polls indicate that a majority of Americans (62% in an ABC/*Washington Post* poll) favor government-run "single-payer" universal healthcare; for more than a decade a majority of doctors, fed up with for-profit managed care, have been in favor of a government-financed, rather than insurance-company-dominated system. Of course, in the current U.S. political scene, majorities do not necessarily rule; money does. Michael Moore likes to play an ordinary guy, but many ordinary guys know that those who pay the campaign bills control the legislative tune. In fact, in *Sicko*'s section on the recent Medicare prescription bill—a giant boondoggle for Big Pharma—he labels each senator, along with Bush himself, with a balloon indicating how much money he got from the drug companies. And he notes that Billy Tauzin, who shepherded the bill through Congress, was rewarded with a $2 million-a-year job. The medical lobby is Washington's biggest and richest. In the cold world of retail politics, only "clean elections"—which replace the present corrupt system of candidate-buying with (voluntary) public financing—can break its grip, and enable rational public-interest legislation on health or anything else to be routinely passed. (Maine, Arizona, and Connecticut now have clean elections, and more states are coming close.)

In some ways it begins to look as if Michael Moore in his very different way is a wild child of the greatest documentarian of our age, Frederick Wiseman. His quietly agonizing portraits of a huge suite of failed American institutions began with our asylums (*Titicut Follies* in 1967), but moved on to encompass *High School* (1968), *Law and Order* (1969), *Model* (1980), *The Store* (1983), *Zoo* (1993), *Domestic Violence* (2001), and many others. Wiseman invented a uniquely personal and poetic style of documentary, characterized by unobtrusive "observational" shooting, and inventive and intuitively powerful cutting. But where Wiseman was oblique and understated, here comes Moore, lumbering and low-class, slapping his films together with a fierce and shameless humor, impatient, openly disrespectful of what used to be called The Power. Wiseman achieved a kind of mournful elegance in portraying our society. Moore seeks blood. But he too, while embodying the outraged decency of the ordinary American, has been cataloguing the cruelty, the perversity, the crass inhumanity of our society: the heartlessness of its industry leaders, the fear and hair-trigger violence of gun-crazy adults and youth, the shameless lying of our government, and now the painful inadequacy of our medical system.

Having shoved the specter of single-payer universal healthcare onto the public agenda, Moore will probably move on, as Fred Wiseman systematically did, to another critically ill American institution. Now it is up to us to see if we can find a cure for this one.

ERNEST CALLENBACH founded *Film Quarterly* and was its editor from 1958 to 1991. He is the author of two novels, *Ecotopia* (1975) and *Ecotopia Emerging* (1981), as well as *Ecology: A Pocket Guide* (University of California Press, 1998).

ABSTRACT Michael Moore's latest polemical documentary is, as this review of *Sicko* argues, characteristically obstreperous and heartfelt. Moore's indictment of U.S. healthcare is in its ambition comparable to the work of Frederick Wiseman, who also depicts the parlous state of failed institutions.

KEYWORDS Michael Moore, healthcare, documentary, American institutions, political film

CREDITS *Sicko*. Director, producer, writer: Michael Moore. Producer: Meghan O'Hara. Camera operator: Tony Hardmon. Editors: Geoffrey Richman, Christopher Seward, Dan Sweitlik. Music: Erin O'Hara. © 2007 The Weinstein Company. U.S. distribution: The Weinstein Company.

CONTROL
JOE STRUMMER: THE FUTURE IS UNWRITTEN
THIS IS ENGLAND

MARK SINKER EXPLORES THREE BRITISH FILMS THAT REVISIT THE ERA OF PUNK ROCK

If the dream of escape has always been key to American popular culture, radical British culture has often insisted that escape is impossible. Think of the Kitchen Sink realist films—want out all you will, they said, your background will rise to keep you where you came from. Small wonder that America's rock'n'roll dream was so intoxicating to 1950s youth in the U.K.—that jukeboxes and blues licks inspired so many to follow one working-class Liverpudlian quartet away from bus stops and back-to-backs toward international glamor and a world beyond the Welfare State.

So in the late 1970s punk was putting something doggedly English back into the global rock'n'roll machine: the idea of escape itself as a trap, an absolute suspicion of any presuggested destination, however thrillingly different. "No Elvis, Beatles or the Rolling Stones," sang The Clash in "1977." Punk insisted that we refuse history itself, past *and* future—insisted that the task be to *make our own present*. Three films—in a glut of recent documentaries and music biopics—explore the possibilities the punk injunction opened up, and hint, formally if not overtly, at the impasse buried within it. Julian Temple's *The Future is Unwritten* is a documentary about the life of Joe Strummer before, after, and during his time as singer for The Clash. *This Is England* is Shane Meadows's study of skinhead life after the eye of subcultural history has passed it by. *Control* is Dutch photographer Anton Corbijn's arthouse biopic of the Manchester group Joy Division.

Rock culture in the late 1970s was a broad passion of belonging and flight, a drama of the individual juggling relations with (and against) collectives old and new. All these films share a sense of the band or the gang as products of a precise time, when post-war social openness still ran just before the wind of the media colonization of subculture and style. You could still move then, unobserved, unprepared, through the real space of the city streets, to walk into a club or a home and discover, not only worlds and time utterly different from yours, but (maybe) your true self. And then together you could perhaps make something unprecedented.

The Future is Unwritten starts with a sound-clip sequence of the announcement on the world's mainstream news outlets of Joe Strummer's death, at fifty, in 2002, of a heart attack, and continues as a messily overambitious collage of recent interview, The Clash's own sound and video archives, and found footage, stock images, and clips from films that illuminate a point. Or as often muddle it, skating us past the issue an interviewee or image has just raised. Early on Strummer's mother's ancestry is signaled via a sound clip of bagpipes playing "The Skye Boat Song"— she was Scottish, but not from Skye. What's the point the music is making? Bagpipes "mean" Scotland, cartoon-style—is this a naughty punky joke, a cheeky punky laziness, or a tiresome punky ignorance and stupidity?

The film's backbone is *London's Calling*, Strummer's radio show for the BBC World Service. Joe's radio links have him avuncular, well-born, likeable, a naively generous guide to scattered nations, peoples, and cultures not our own. The world pop he plays intercuts with the tale of his life, the achieved now giving shape to a hectic then. The bash-it-down clip flood allows for a lot of material, but we're swept past most of it unreflectively. Against a driven, ruthless past—broken friendships, firings, exclusions—was this belated mellowing hard-won, always there in bud, somehow kindled during his years of hardline posture? Are the scenes from the animated *Animal Farm* (1954) and *1984* (1956) intended to sketch the state of the U.K. in 1977, the paranoid set-up within the Clash camp, both? Here's Lindsay Anderson's *if* . . . . (1968): does it signal Strummer's attitudes to his public-school days, or critique the pop-radical hope that revolution will be a war of the gorgeous against the dowdy? These home-movie clips of Strummer as a child in spacious sunlit gardens—privileged

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Joe Strummer: The Future is Unwritten: rock'n'roll evolution. Courtesy of Film4/4 DVD

background, father a diplomat, infancy spent in wide-flung exotic locales—went unseen while Strummer was alive, but why his childhood was kept so dark stays dark.

As a memorial biopic, with U.S. audiences in mind, *The Future is Unwritten* portrays one man's heroic evolution; it dodges past any coherent portrait of the group he was so charismatic within, The Clash as a micro-unit criss-crossed by its own struggles—and it's unrewardingly opaque about the social groups he was escaping towards (such as the world of the Celebrity Media Rebel). No one better symbolizes than Strummer the conflicts sublimated into such a self-transformation—yet while this is a fact the film everywhere manifests, it never addresses it. The radio-dial device glides over exactly what it should open up. Contradiction and unclarity abound—but are never brought into the present, to implicate Temple, or—more importantly—us, as viewer–consumers. Rock was divided against itself; punk was divided against itself. And so was—and is—the world at large, and the energy and value of The Clash was as much as anything what it's tempting to call its social impossibility—a fact that requires digging down beyond the sum of its sonic parts into the conflicting tensions of the desires as they came together. Collage as an *energy* is drawn on throughout; collage as an *argument*—as a drama of the various elements brought together—is evident nowhere in the film. The use and non-use of collage in the original music is merely reflected, never challenged. With all the world's stances available (sentimentalized) at the touch of a dial, what's obscured is exactly the potential for liberation that's been lost since, which was a species of cruising rather than mere tourism, the idea that you—like posh kid Joe—could walk entirely out of the gated community of your class, your upbringing, the perspective or role you were born to, and connect, lifesavingly, to others, from elsewhere, seeking likewise.

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By contrast, Shane Meadows's *This Is England* vividly captures this sense of possibility—though (for the sake of an ending) it increasingly switches to sociocultural short cut, and cliché. It's the fictional story of eleven-year-old Shaun, played by actor Thomas Turgoose as a pint-sized cheeky goblin with a ready gurgle of a laugh and a face swift to puzzlement, anger, or unhappiness. His father recently dead in the Falklands, Shaun falls in with skinheads and his life is transformed in perilous, self-affirming ways.

The story plays out as a struggle for Shaun's soul across a series of extended group scenes during which loneliness dissolves into tightly coded belonging, and back out again as he achieves mini-manhood, waking up to who he doesn't want to be. Shaun is being bullied for crimes against style, his trousers being flares bought him by his late father. In an underpass back toward his estate, he encounters a multiracial gang clustered round suedehead Woody (the ruefully amiable Joe Gilgun, drawn to Shaun's unhappiness and instantly protective). They take him in and dude him up as their little mascot, in Ben Sherman shirt, jeans with braces, little bovver boots, and the all-important head-crop.

With Shaun as their natty mannequin, a tiny adult betokening the group's hopes of social continuity, trouble stomps in. In a classic slow-motion interlude, the gang strut their subcultural stuff over a Toots and the Maytals song, a collective unified by chosen look and soundtrack. But if this is prideful music-video ritual, there's a latter-day unease to its swagger (injected possibly by Quentin Tarantino, of all people, whose use of the same device in *Reservoir Dogs* [1992]

The struggle for Shaun's style and soul in *This Is England*.

© [2006] Warp Films Limited, FilmFour, UK Film Council, EM Media, reen Yorkshire. DVD: Optimum Home Entertainment (U.K.)

was a portent of overreach and doom to come). Retribution arrives in the shape of Combo, enough like Shaun physically that he looms also as the ghastly, jealous, furious, miserable, thrilling demon of Shaun's future, emotionally and politically. A racist just out of prison, Combo (Stephen Graham, both charismatic and frighteningly unstable, a time bomb primed and set) takes Shaun to a neo-Nazi meeting. In the film's climax, after an evening of strained dope-smoking rapprochement between Combo and Milky (Andrew Shim as the gentle, admirably easygoing young black two-toner, one of the gang members Shaun first meets), Combo suddenly attacks Milky and nearly kills him. Appalled and frightened, Shaun breaks with Combo, and the film ends as he throws his St George's flag into the estuary.

Such purposeless play can be no match for the manipulative class-bound moralism of the non-fictional world, however unhappy and distorted and brittle this moralism may be.

The dateline appears precise (1983), complete with intro montage of time-fixing TV clips (Roland Rat, the Royal Wedding, the Falklands War, found documentary footage of the era)—but there's a dreamy inexactness to these strangely underpeopled Northern cityscapes, the accents varying widely. That Combo's reappearance, after three years prison-time, acts as a rupture is a hint that the apparent subcultural continuity is operating in unreal time. *This Is England* at its strongest allows that a social subpocket can also (tentatively) develop from below an autonomy uncoerced by the leisure industry, despite the hand-me-downs that its believers flirt with. In the escapade preceding the makeover, for a spree across open fields and tidily contained hooliganism in an abandoned house, they tog out in wildly style-less mish-mash of unlikely costumes (including goggles, kimono, cowboy hat, Davey Crocket cap, and novelty umbrella-bonnet). Woody's gang are urban youth in *ultima Thule*, far from any centralized cultural importance; they embrace this disconnect in order to cope with it, to keep themselves who they are, a micro-society playing at dress-up for what they can enjoy as their own reasons.

But such purposeless play can be no match for the manipulative class-bound moralism of the non-fictional world, however unhappy and distorted and brittle this moralism may be. Combo, embodiment of the Bigger Daddy of mediated allegiance—an inchoately angry pseudo-Englishness, ourselves as rejects bound together—fails on his own terms, but shatters Woody's utopia on the way.

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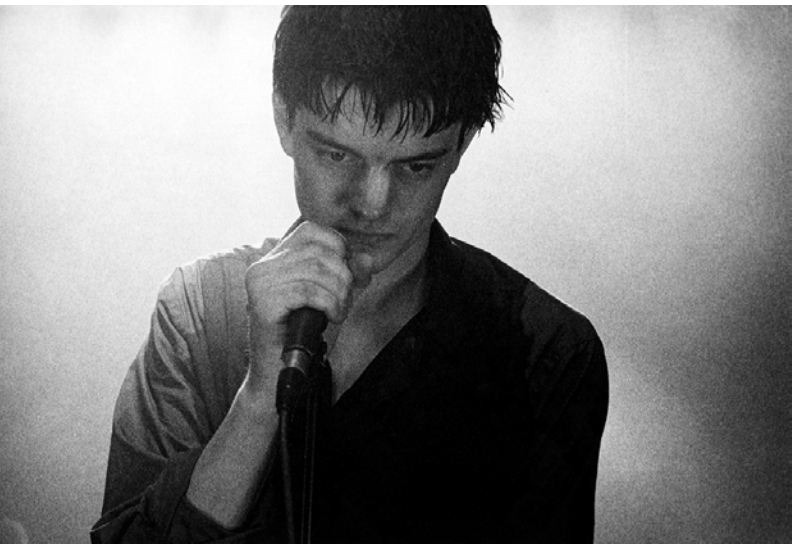
Far less self-absorbed or purposeless, punk's self-fashioning—its erasure of futures and pasts, its refusal of the drag of *any* pre-existing group—always also risked self-erasure. Ian Curtis's suicide in May 1980 was an act of cataclysmic flight and failure within a movement that had seemed to be throwing rock wide open, to both the dizzier and the darker reaches of vanguard art, politics, and life, to an absolute unrelenting seriousness. The primary source is widow Deborah Curtis's 1995 memoir, *Touching from a Distance*, which details the following story, more or less as the film does: ambitious glam fan Curtis (Sam Riley), desperate to quit grim Macclesfield, marries fellow teenager Deborah (Samantha Morton), becomes singer for Joy Division, evolves a style of writing and singing that catapults the band towards worldwide success—but intensity of performance kindles his latent epilepsy, the freedoms and boredoms of touring leave him unsatisfied with his marriage and he starts an affair with a Belgian fan, Annik Honoré (Alexandra Maria Lara); increasingly the nature of the life he's caught up in repels him. On the eve of the first American tour he hangs himself.

The memoir—named for a line in the Joy Division song "Transmission"—was received on its publication as a useful demystifying counter to the romanticization of intellectual seriousness within post-punk culture: Deborah's sense of loss and betrayal sketches a weak, brilliant man, on the run from his background, the mundanity of his life, a supportive and adoring wife, a baby child. The film's name is likely also a Joy Division reference, turning the blunt bleak statement of the song "She's Lost Control" back into a question—how in control was singer Curtis at the moment when he hanged himself? Was this an escape, or a failure to escape?

Joy Division's stock-in-trade was a rigorous extremity of bleakness: the first lines spoken in the film—"Existence, well what does it matter? I exist on the best terms I can," as an interior monologue, but taken from the song "Heart and Soul"—could hardly have been less in the orthodox rock'n'roll spirit. Here was a group whose very name seized on the compensatory sexual *jeu d'esprit* that Elvis danced out into the wider world, and recast it in one of its most hideous manifestations (Joy Division being a Nazi euphemism for a slave brothel). Here too was the bow wave of post-punk attitude—unafraid to be pitilessly arty, an almost ridiculous concentrate of mannered dourness pushed beyond reasonable limit (this being Curtis's death, treated as validation and *ne plus ultra*).

Dressing up as Ian Curtis, which is to say someone historical, a person many of us remember, Riley is powerfully able to invoke Curtis in emotional transport, eyes rolling



Solitude, togetherness . . . and a brick wall: forms and themes in Anton Corbijn's *Control*.

© [2007] Northsee Ltd. Courtesy Momentum Pictures

back in the head, his voluntary physical spasm always just a synapse-spark away from collapse into the uncontrolled fit that soon begins to follow; the body itself as terrible, near-comical prison. In Corbijn's own photographs of Joy Division at the time—this was the first band he worked with on arrival in the U.K., and he became their semi-official portraitist—Curtis seems some kind of pale-eyed, feral, possessed changeling. Riley is reassuringly pitch-perfect as Curtis the performer, but the off-stage character he delivers is much too much the vaguely foppish, befringed, depressive indie-rock type. It's Morton as Deborah who carries the more unearthly charge (Corbijn first worked with her on a U2 video, where she played a mermaid who loves but can't be with a land-bound man). If she's the accusing housewife of (one version of) the narrative, she is nevertheless (as far as the camera's concerned) the more startlingly intense of the two, the truly voiceless, the truly left-behind.

Three scenes show how the need for belonging unites and divides. The first is when Ian first flirts with Deborah. "I don't *wanna* be in your gang!" is her come-on put-down; "Nor do I!" is his response, half-joking, half-prescient. Later, at the instant when Joy Division becomes a reality—with all its future members in the audience at the Free Trade Hall—we don't get to watch this legendary Sex Pistols show as the characters do, but rather Deborah's and Ian's faces nestling into one another, his rapt and lost, seeing and hearing himself in the turbulent, hectoring, hurtling sound, hers happy, excited, and distracted: she's intrigued and perhaps a bit unnerved by the strange-looking audience around her, the world here now.

The third is at the birth of their daughter Natalie: again, two faces in one shot. This time it's Deborah who's totally lost, in bodily love and care for the baby she cradles; Ian is huddled away against the hospital wall, frightened to the point of nausea at the world he's finding himself in, utterly cut off from the people he loves, shackled and daunted by the demands of this family future on the future he wants to lose himself in.

The camera's sly allegiances are key to Corbijn's treatment of this story. It's entirely in black and white, but Corbijn has almost invariably worked in black and white—he brought to the rock papers of the early 1980s, the *NME* in particular, an under-celebrated blossoming of cultural richness in this unlikeliest of pop-industry milieus. His contribution to rock photography and to pop video-making has been a curious intuitive (and non-English?) jumbling of conventions, an often unexpectedly funny or prankish widening of the palette of expressive elements. His portraits were notorious for their focus on the texture of walls and backdrops, a device revisited in *Control*, where a brick wall outside a Labour Exchange or the curlicued tactility of 70s wallpaper and inner-door glass feels more sumptuous and alive than the glum figures flailing in front of it. If Curtis hated Macclesfield, this camerawork certainly doesn't. *This Is England*'s palette is in summery color, yet its subject landscapes seem emptied, unhappy wastelands. *Control*'s is rigorously monochrome—but the effect is to bring the inanimate to life.

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How does the music itself function—its making, its selection—within the narrative of these films ("diegetically," to use the technical term)? Something *The Future is Unwritten* lacks is any sense that musics other than straight rock'n'roll, rock, or punk ever offer the kinds of openness assumed central to rock in its story of itself. Salsa, reggae, afropop are deployed with that familiar all-too-pat current-affairs shorthand which is after instant mood and lyric-as-borrowed-headline, and in the process shuts down where the song came from, and how. *This Is England* slides a valiant refusal under such by-the-yard sociology, at least in its first, better half. The opening news-footage montage is set in tension *against* Toots and the Maytals singing "54 46 Was My Number," two strikingly different media takes on the world; the slo-mo sequence is also the Maytals, singing a version of "Louie Louie" where that song's notoriously unclear words are reduced to hilarious unbothered mumble (a tiny emblem of purposeless play). The ugly answering passage to this slo-mo walk, the scene of skinhead predation in which Shaun is initiated into anti-Pakistani violence, is scored by Ludovico Einaudi's desolately gluey chamber music. Significant reaches of the action take place over no music at all. Everywhere else, music of identification—oi or ska or whatever—is imposed in the foreground, a soundtrack presence unavailable for interaction within the space of the film action.

Diegetic radio voices occur a couple of times (they're Shaun's alarm clock), and there's diegetic music in the party scenes, records naturally being played, though we never see them chosen. In the makeover scene, in a room bedecked with posters and record sleeves from a cluster of connected subcultures, primarily ska and two-tone, a famous image of reggae singer and film star Jimmy Cliff from the poster of *The Harder They Come* (1972) is visible behind Milky's head. But after the stubbornness of its early pitch for dress-up as unpatrolled creativity, a wised-up post-punk piety is increasingly affirmed, about commodification of identity, and choice and nostalgia and play and reality, as potential catastrophes of unfreedom predetermined within a received sociology of subcultures—and the film simply isn't strict enough here. Shaun's rejection of programmed skinhead future and arrival at stereotypical narrative adulthood, a heroic little man alone at last, is scored via a rather hard-to-spot acoustic cover version of

a Smiths song, knee-jerkily impeccable as to sentiment and post-punk ethic, no doubt, but ridiculous as regards Shaun as the author of his own dawning individual cultural identity.

In *Control*, diegesis is in full effect. We are hearing the songs these characters chose to write and perform to become themselves, to escape the reactionary clutches of community, as authors of themselves in artistic freedom—and here is the bursting pinpoint energy of the band's early sound, a muscle and gristle lovingly recreated by the actors (who all actually play), under the exacting eye of the surviving band members, just for this movie. The subliminal argument here is more complex for a very strong reason—voiceless they may not exactly have been, but the rest of the band were also left behind, a surviving self-made community that carried on in music as New Order, whose success continued but vastly outstripped Joy Division's.

Do we make culture, or does culture make us? The nostalgia at work in all these retrospectives can be described as a nostalgia for a time when the collective energy of pop wasn't quite yet commodified, before all was simply gathered up before it begins and fed back at us, any potential movement on our part circumscribed. But surely this analysis trivializes the loss, converts it into a glib semi-academic, pseudo-political lecture as stifling in its assumptions—about the possibility of escape—as Kitchen Sink. There are countless rock'n'roll songs about radio as a vector to surprise and bodily joy and freedom—but "Transmission," the song for which Curtis's wife's memoir is named, is a song about music and radio that shudders in the face of togetherness as fear, sex as tomb, companionship as a lie. "No language, just sound, that's all we need know," the song continues: confusing commodification with representation, and raging against both, Curtis refused even to believe in art, let alone pop, except as an escape from life itself, and this refusal is the prison that the current re-engagement with the lost meaning of a youth committed to music runs endlessly up against. Isn't what's really being yearned for a lost *fearlessness* before the specter of the all-destroying commodity?

Two traps dog all biopics: first, the conundrum of the representation of creativity itself, and second—which dogs the first—hindsight: we know only too well how things turn out, and read every detail as a route map to the fixed outcome, the very outcome that characters in the story can't yet see. Where Temple juggles confusions to get himself off the hook, and Meadows ends up mistrusting the impulses of his own best characters, Corbijn is somehow able to ask us to put ourselves

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in the crux of choice, unfolding the well-known story so as to involve you the watcher–listener in its hidden freedoms, pulled now towards mobility as escape, now towards mobility as betrayal, caught yourself in the grinding quotidian of medication and invalidism, of family duties and services to the wants of fans. The magnificent legend of the lonely tortured artist in touch with truth conflicts with duty and care and protection towards those you love, with the ordinary time together you owe them, even with the extraordinary things you spent collective time with them making ("things" that include yourselves and your locale). Choose life, like Deborah? Choose flight, like Ian? Which does cap-A Art side with? Is Art's friend–foe Pop on the same side? The words of Joy Division's songs remain, after all, utterly Ian's—writing driven and shaped and centered by his unmistakeable, tune-smearing deep chant. But the music—so closely wound into the words and yet, apparently, so separate—was by no means just his. And the look—Corbijn's own art—is secretly on Deborah's side. In the proposal scene, in a classic Kitchen Sink trope that Corbijn revisits several times, the young lovers are up on the moors, away from cramped streets for a day. Later we see them arguing, ruinously, with the moors looming powerfully behind, a landscape they can't as a couple get back to. And finally, in the last shot of the film, we rise with the crematorium smoke until we're level with the faraway hilltops. The shot is objective correlative to Curtis's own self-immolating bid for freedom, but what's pictured is in the world, not out of it. It's an image of what's left behind.

MARK SINKER's book on Lindsay Anderson's *if* . . . . was published in the BFI Film Classics series in 2004.

ABSTRACT A trio of British films depicting the era of Punk deal in different ways with the idea of escape and rebellion against social norms. This essay compares the way the visual aesthetics, narrative, and music combine to depict youth subcultures in *Control*, *Joe Strummer: The Future is Unwritten*, and *This Is England*

KEYWORDS punk, biopics, rock documentary, film music, Joy Division

CREDITS *Control*. Director, producer: Anton Corbijn. Producers: Todd Eckert, Orian Williams. Screenplay: Matt Greenhalgh (based on the book *Touching From a Distance* by Deborah Curtis). Cinematographer: Martin Ruhe. Music: Joy Division, New Order. © [2007] Northsee Ltd. U.S. distribution: The Weinstein Company.

Joe Strummer: The Future is Unwritten. Director: Julien Temple. Producers: Anna Campeau, Alan Moloney, Amanda Temple. Cinematographer: Ben Cole. Editors: Niven Howie, Mark Reynolds, Tobias Zaldua. © 2006 Nitrate Strummer Ltd, Parallel Film Productions Ltd. U.S. distribution: IFC Films.

This Is England. Director, writer: Shane Meadows. Producer: Mark Herbert. Cinematographer: Danny Cohen. Editor: Chris Wyatt. Music: Ludovico Einaudi. © [2006] Warp Films Limited, FilmFour, UK Film Council, EM Media, Screen Yorkshire. U.S. distribution: IFC Films. DVD: Optimum Releasing (U.K.)

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CHAOTIC ANA

PAUL JULIAN SMITH ARGUES THAT JULIO MEDEM'S KALEIDOSCOPIC LATEST FILM REPAYS CLOSE SCRUTINY

With six features to his name, acclaimed by critics and public alike, Julio Medem has arguably produced the most important body of work in contemporary Spanish cinema, with the exception of Almodóvar. And, more even than Almodóvar, he is the figure most likely to be granted the status of auteur. Medem's themes have proved surprisingly consistent from his debut with Basque historical drama *Vacas* (1992) to his most recent fiction film, the erotic odyssey *Sex and Lucía* (2001). Blending as he does reality and fantasy, Medem explores in idiosyncratic fashion the loaded social and political topics of gender and nationality. If these broad themes are common to many other filmmakers, Medem's signature style remains immediately recognizable, with its eccentric camera placement (often adopting the perspective of animals or objects), discontinuous editing (with already complex narratives fragmented into enigmatic shards), and lush orchestral soundtracks (provided by prizewinning composer Alberto Iglesias).

It is no surprise, then, that film scholars have been drawn to this rare example of auteur cinema. In his 2007 book on the director from Manchester University Press, Rob Stone has celebrated Medem's work as a continuing intimate narrative which he claims is based on uniquely personal references and aesthetics. Nuria Triana-Toribio has offered a more critical account in *Spanish National Cinema* (Routledge, 2002), suggesting that scholars have seized on Medem as an artist whose supposed purity of vision "redeems the commercial sins" of Spanish cinema, defending its honor at home and abroad. One recent Spanish volume on Medem, which combines critical essays and extensive interviews with the director, is called characteristically *Contra la certeza* (*Against Certainty* [Festival de Cine de Huesca, 2005]). The title suggests, paradoxically perhaps, that it is Medem's uncertainty—his ideological skepticism and his refusal clearly to direct his audience—that provides the constant guiding thread that any auteur's *oeuvre* must exhibit.

Chaotic Ana, Medem's first fiction film in six years and his first feature since *The Basque Ball* (2003), a controversial documentary on the conflict in his native region, thus bears an unusually heavy weight of expectation. In pre-release press coverage in Spain Medem did his best to play up his own credentials as an auteur. *Ana*, he stated repeatedly, was the result of a lengthy struggle to overcome personal and professional tragedy. The first misfortune was the tragic death of his sister, whose naively colorful paintings are featured in the film, while the second was the hostile response of some Spanish critics to *The Basque Ball*, which he compared to a "lynching."

Playing on the common name of Medem's late sister and his young protagonist, a lengthy feature on the cover of the Sunday magazine of *El País*, Spain's best-selling centre-left newspaper, was headlined "My Journey with Ana." Presented, like the film itself, as a countdown from ten to zero, the article stresses the unusually lengthy production process, which derived in part from Medem's selection of a novice actress as his new star (nineteen-year-old Manuela Vellés was plucked from her first year of drama school). Technically grueling, the project is also said to be Medem's most ambitious yet, and is presented as a kind of aesthetic odyssey. Medem shot in Ibiza, where Ana lives and paints in a cave with her German father (Matthias Habich); in Madrid, where she joins an artists' commune at the invitation of enigmatic patron Justine (an underused Charlotte Rampling); in the Canaries, whose sand dunes stand in for the Western Sahara, the native land of Ana's first lover, the exiled Said (Nicolas Cazalé); and, finally and for the first time, in the U.S., where Ana works as a New York waitress.

As well as involving geographical travel, *Chaotic Ana* also stretches back in time on account of a past-life-regression plot. The wide-eyed and wild-haired Ana is initially seen reveling in the immediacy of chaotic pleasure (we first see her dancing in a strobe-lit Ibiza nightclub and floating naked

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Julio Medem directing *Chaotic Ana*, the hooded hawk in shot. © 2007 Sogecine, Alicia Produce, Volcano Films

on a turquoise Mediterranean), rejecting history and depth. Shortly afterwards, however, she meets Anglo (Asier Newman), a handsome young hypnotherapist who persuades her to be repeatedly hypnotized. In this state, Ana regresses to earlier lives that are notable especially for their violence; in each past-life episode, her incarnation is murdered by a vicious patriarch, most brutally and disturbingly at the end of the episode—the last such sequence in the film, but chronologically the earliest—which occurs in an Arizona Navajo reservation. Another reason for the lengthy production was that Vellés required, according to *El País*, an extended period of rehearsal and preparation for the role, during which she submitted (as did Medem himself) to sessions of hypnosis.

FALLING FROM GRACE

In the run-up to *Ana*'s release, rumors mounted about production problems with the film, which suffered lengthy delays. *Ana*, which is co-produced by Medem's own company and Sogecine, which along with the film's distributor Sogepaq forms part of Spain's largest media conglomerate, opened wide on 150 screens on 24 August, taking a respectable $500,000 in the first weekend. But by the second week many cinemas had restricted screenings to late-night slots. And Spanish critics, once so laudatory, were damning. *El País*, the most influential paper, said that *Ana* was Medem's "most ambitious and least plausible" project, "brilliant in its form" and "profoundly naive in its content." Surprisingly for a paper that shares Medem's political perspective (including the anti-Americanism so widespread in Spain), it also claimed that *Ana*'s reflections on the war in Iraq, the conflict in the Sahara, the American Indian genocide, the legacy of patriarchy, and the myth of feminine creativity were "banal clichés of the Left," better suited to a cinematic apprentice than to a prestigious author. Fernando Méndez Leite, perhaps Spain's most respected critic, reiterated the "prestige" of the film's "auteur," but, giving *Ana* a measly one-star rating, claimed that this film is Medem's most pretentious and pedantic.

Now in spite of this "prestige" (with which Medem is so readily attributed and of which he is so rapidly stripped), Medem has in fact not always been honored as a cinematic prophet in his own country. Indeed as a filmmaker steeped in fantasy and formal experiment, he runs counter to the

dominant national tradition of filmmaking which is generally agreed within Spain to be one of social realism. If he has fallen from grace, then (and at the time of writing, just two weeks after its release, *Ana* is already held in Spain to be a famous disaster), then it has to be acknowledged that Medem's seventh feature does seem at first sight unusually crude in its exploration of gender and nationality.

Like that of Almodóvar once more, Medem's career can be read as a collaboration with a succession of gifted women actors (*El País*'s website even published pictures of past stars labelled his "chicas"). But while earlier actresses such as Emma Suárez (*Vacas*, *The Red Squirrel*, *Tierra*) and Najwa Nimri (*Lovers of the Arctic Circle*) were already experienced and accomplished, the winsome novice Vellés, with her pale green eyes and paler skin, seems less able to carry a picture, weighed down like the fictional Ana by forces beyond her control. And while Medem has in previous films made subtle and complex comments on his native Basque country, calling into question a nationalism based on blood and land, here he invokes Sahrawis and American Indians as romantic rebels, mere foils for a Spanish teenager's quest for identity. The sense of superficial Third Worldism is reinforced by the fact that Medem has now abandoned the subtle orchestrations of Iglesias for a soundtrack of New Age tribal chants by the British composer Jocelyn Pook. It is telling perhaps that although, by his own account, Medem flew to Arizona to meet with Navajo elders, they did not agree to see him. Surely this cinematic journey, however ambitious, must prove circular, even solipsistic?

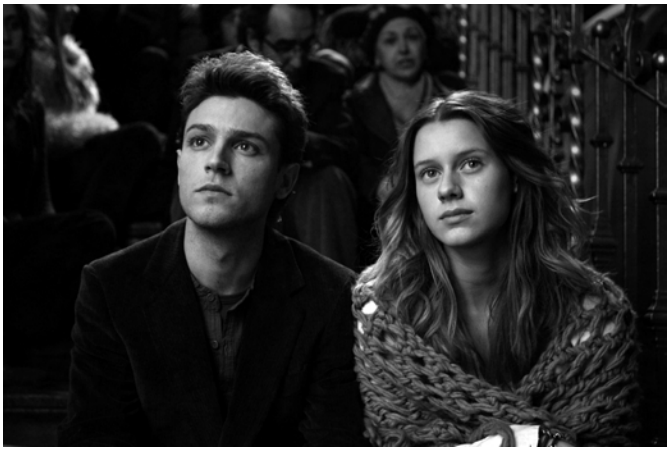
The foreignness of this journey for Spanish audiences is heightened by the disconcerting fact that most of Medem's actors are working in a second language (Newman, who is British, seems particularly uncomfortable in Spanish). Even radical feminist Linda, Ana's best friend in Madrid (played by well-known Spanish rock singer Bebe), has a marked regional accent. The youth of the photogenic cast, some of whom have previous experience as models, is also noteworthy. In interview Medem has left some hostages to fortune here, claiming that with this film he felt "younger" than his true age (still strikingly handsome, he is nonetheless pushing fifty) and had been "rejuvenated" by his latest project. Medem would not be the first middle-aged filmmaker to fall in love, Pygmalion-like, with sexy teenagers and exotic natives.

Yet *Ana*, so roundly dismissed as a misstep by the Spanish establishment, shares much with Medem's previous, lauded films. Like *Vacas*, it addresses historical process (although here Ana's past lives go back two thousand years). Like *The Red Squirrel* (1993), it is an allegory of machismo (although now the gender critique is unambiguous). Like *Tierra* (1996), its protagonist experiences supernatural visions (although in *Ana*, unlike in *Tierra*, there is no doubt that they are genuine). Moreover this new Ana shares the same palindromic name with the heroine of *Lovers of the Arctic Circle* (1998) and an erotic odyssey (albeit less explicit) with the protagonist of *Sex and Lucía*. Even *Ana*'s newly vocal politics, widely dismissed as sophomoric, are not too dissimilar to those of *The Basque Ball*, whose undoubted courage and good intentions did not make for sophistication. There are thus clear continuities between *Ana* and Medem's earlier work. For example the use of palindromic names, a signature technique derived from Medem's own unusual surname, is a continuing interest of a highly formalist filmmaker obsessed with patterns of symmetry. But these continuities are not enough in themselves to justify an attempt at recuperating this film. If the film is to be championed in the face of widespread local critical opinion, it must be on the basis of its own virtues.

MEDEM'S VISUAL RHETORIC

So let us look more closely. I shall suggest, first, that we pay more attention to a technique that remains typically dazzling; and second, that we take seriously the subjectivism and superficiality which Spanish critics have used to damn *Ana*. After all, the first foreign critics to see the film after its Spanish premiere, at the Toronto Film Festival, were far more positive in their assessment. And, in the two packed Madrid theaters where I saw *Ana* just days after its release, young audiences remained raptly attentive, even hypnotized, until the film's strikingly bizarre ending.

Ana begins, bizarrely also, with an Andalusian hunting party that will never appear again. A handler is praising the "powerful vision" of a hawk, which, grotesquely masked, sits on his gloved hand as a tethered dove struggles nearby. We see the hawk's mask removed so that the handler can wipe and clean the bird's eyes. This ablution performed, Medem's camera first soars and then swoops with the predator. Suddenly the dove is lying in agony on the ground: white feathers and green grass are spotted with red blood. This bird motif will recur consistently throughout the film, beginning with Ana's naive paintings. Vibrantly colored with wax crayon, they are sold in the Ibiza market where elegant Parisienne Justine first encounters the hippy Ana. On moving to Madrid, Ana, all in livid green among the more soberly dressed citizens of the metropolis, encounters in the street a sinister woman with hawk feathers on her hat. Later in Arizona she has visions of the first patriarch to kill her in another life, who proudly sports plumage as he hacks at her with an axe. In the goriest scene (shot typically from the characters' own point of view) the parents of Said are eaten alive by vultures that peck out their eyes. Enigmatic leitmotifs thus poetically knit



Clockwise from top left: Ana and Justine in the artists' commune, Said in the desert, Medem and Manuela Vellés on location in Ibiza, Ana with Anglo. © 2007 Sogecine, Alicia Produce, Volcano Films

together a film which is willfully innocent of narrative causation and psychological motivation.

While the film's dialogue may be banal (Ana's feminist friend Linda often repeats the line that "all men are rapists"), the visual rhetoric is much more engrossing. Medem is clearly urging us to have our eyes "cleaned" like the hawk in order to look at the natural and social world anew. Here the second key image is the door. Ana paints phantom doors on the walls of her cave in Ibiza and her artist's studio in Madrid. And she tells her first boyfriend Said that, never having been in love, she has another "door" that needs to be opened. More over-explicitness aside, these doors are may also be seen as portals to a new kind of vision for character and spectator alike. Ana will repeatedly have to see with new eyes: as Anglo counts backward from ten, she enters successive stages of the life of a Sahrawi mother, whose child (Said, once more) is forcibly taken from her. These traumatic flashes are shot once again with disorientating and distressing point-of-view shots. Soon an unexpected animated version of Ana's painting reveals that each door represents a past life cut short by violent death.

Ana's grizzled and much-loved father, who is presented in an entirely positive fashion, perhaps to refute Linda's pessimistic generalization, says that the history of men is just "a succession of atrocities." But Justine claims that we all carry history within us, that nobody is innocent. Exploiting gorgeous digital video (less grainy than in *Sex and Lucía*), Medem successfully convinces through his shooting style, if not through his dialogue, that it is indeed possible, even necessary, to identify with others. It is striking that even the sex scenes avoid the fetishization of *Sex and Lucía* by shooting, alternately, from the two partners' perspectives: as Said, we move vertiginously up Ana's bare body and, as Ana, we are suspended beneath his heaving torso.

Hence while the film's narrative seems inconsequential (Said will come and go apparently at random; Anglo's confession of love to Ana has no pay-off), Medem's visual recreation of a poetics of everyday life remains compelling. Ana may seem strangely passive for a feminist heroine, dependent in turn on patron Justine, lover Said, and therapist Anglo, even telling Anglo that she would not care if he took advantage of her while she was unconscious. And still photographs of Anglo's sessions with his patient show her body straining upwards in the hysterical *arc de cercle*, a phenomenon long demythologized by feminist critics of psychoanalysis. But shot simply walking down the city street (whether Madrid's Gran Vía or New York's Sixth Avenue), Medem's mobile camera makes Vallés's Ana, fingers twisting in the air, dance with all the possibilities of youth, freedom, and independence.

Ana's chaotic visions, in which she speaks French or Arabic and volunteers information she could not have known, are accepted as authentic by all within the film. But Medem himself has said in Spanish press interviews that he doubts the

Ana with Linda in Madrid (left), Ana in New York. © 2007 Sogecine, Alicia Produce, Volcano Films

possibility of the hypnotic regression depicted in *Ana*. It seems likely, then, that the hypnosis serves rather as a metaphor for the unique flexibility of film to transcend time and space, a resource Medem has fully exploited here. Indeed he takes advantage of a wide range of seductive and fluid techniques: jerky slow and fast motion (Ana in the Ibiza nightclub), atmospheric night shooting (the moon gleaming on the Mediterranean), and underwater and aerial shots (Ana floating in the sea, the repeated flights of the falcon and dove). Even familiar locations (New York harbor viewed from a sailboat, Monument Valley from a cruising car) feel as if they are shown for the first time. Medem remains as infatuated with the ever-renewed resources of cinema as he is with the young stars who he says have rejuvenated him after personal and professional trauma. This unusually heightened and manifest delight in cinematic devices must have contributed significantly to the rapt response I observed among young viewers in Madrid.

A PRODUCTIVE UNCERTAINTY

It seems plausible also that the film's politics, dismissed as juvenile, should be read in the light of this subjective perspective and are fully appropriate for *Ana*'s youthful heroine and likely target audience. This will help us to appraise a final scene that is already notorious. After her excursion to Arizona Ana, who has now swapped the blonde dreadlocks of her Ibizan youth for a sophisticated black bob, is waitressing in a plush midtown restaurant (Medem typically gives us no narrative motivation here). Alerted to the fact that she will be serving a middle-aged male politician who is responsible for the war in Iraq, an ultimate American patriarch, Ana makes a date with him in his hotel suite only to shit on his face when they go to bed. In unsubtle English she proclaims: "Wars were invented by men like you," "I am a sexual terrorist," and "[t]his is a poetic act." As the man known only as "Mr H." savagely beats her, Medem cuts back to a primal aggressor: the plumed American Indian warrior looming over an earlier Ana with his axe.

Given the evidence of the film so far, Ana's scatological revenge seems a somewhat inadequate response to two millennia of male aggression. But on this occasion, and uniquely, the female victim does not die. Soon Ana is staggering down Sixth Avenue once more, bloodied but unbowed, and even laughing. Medem's camera lingers enigmatically on a monumental sculpture by pop artist Jim Dine, a version of the headless Venus de Milo, before cutting briefly back to our first vision of Ana, suspended on the surface of the sea. Unlike the political perspective, which is, as Spanish critics warned, somewhat sophomoric, the visual rhetoric here works "against certainty." The viewer is left drifting like the Ibizan Ana, with no clear direction as to how to interpret this open ending.

Medem is a master of these indeterminate terminations: *Tierra* ended with an enigmatic shot of birds (once more) wheeling in concert above the sea, *Lovers* with twin, mutually exclusive endings to its transnational love story. Clearly *Ana* was an especially difficult project for Medem and one that leaves even longtime fans like myself somewhat ambivalent. But there seems little doubt that with his seventh feature Medem's clean-eyed cinematic vision remains as seductive as it is distinctive.

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ABSTRACT Julio Medem's reputation is as an auteur of Spanish cinema, but his 2007 film *Chaotic Ana* was not well received on its release in Spain. However, Paul Julian Smith argues that the film discloses a visual rhetoric that rewards close analysis.

KEYWORDS Julio Medem, Spanish cinema, past-life regression, auteur cinema, feminist fable

CREDITS *Caótica Ana.* Director, producer, screenplay, editor: Julio Medem. Producers: Simón de Santiago, Enrique López Lavigne, Koldo Zuazua. Director of photography: Mario Montero. Music: Jocelyn Pook. © 2007 Sogecine, Alicia Produce, Volcano Films. U.K. distribution: Tartan Films.

GENTLE ICONOCLAST: AN INTERVIEW WITH DAVID GATTEN

SCOTT MACDONALD TALKS TO A FILMMAKER WHO SEES HIS PRACTICE AS A FORM OF HISTORICAL RESEARCH

David Gatten has been a fixture on the contemporary avant-garde media scene since the late 1990s. He has been active within the community of no-budget filmmakers and the network of micro-cinemas that has developed in recent years (for a time his home doubled as a micro-cinema); and like so many of his contemporaries, he has been fascinated with the possibilities of working directly with film—doing his own developing, inventing unusual procedures for generating images: for his *What the Water Said* series (1997, 2007) Gatten throws raw film stock into the South Carolina surf (in a crab trap) and allows natural forces to etch imagery onto the filmstrip. Most importantly, Gatten's remarkable ongoing project, *Secret History of the Dividing Line, A True Account in Nine Parts*, has become a pivotal work that implicitly reflects on a century of avant-garde film production, offering a new sense of that history. In the program notes he composed for *The Great Art of Knowing* (2004), part two of the *Secret History* project (to distinguish the multipartite project from the film of the same name, I shall refer to the former as "the *Secret History* project" and the latter by the longer title), Gatten included this statement: "An antinomian cinema seems possible. A gentle iconoclasm?" These lines are revealing of Gatten's sense of the *Secret History* project and of his identity as an avant-garde filmmaker. "Antinomian" has two relatively distinct meanings: on one hand, the word refers to those Christians who believe that faith alone is necessary for salvation; and on the other, it refers to forms of contradiction or opposition between principles that seem equally reasonable and necessary. Both senses of "antinomian" are relevant to Gatten and to the *Secret History* project.

Gatten's reference to religious tradition is his way of situating himself in relation to that community of canonical avant-garde filmmakers for whom filmmaking has been a spiritual practice: Stan Brakhage, Bruce Baillie, Kenneth Anger, Jonas Mekas, Larry Gottheim, Nathaniel Dorsky . . . In both his *Reminiscences of a Journey to Lithuania* (1972) and *Lost Lost Lost* (1962), Mekas imagines a community of media-makers devoted to the primacy of the human spirit and to filmmaking as a way of participating in the ages-old quest for spiritual connection. Both within his films and within his life as a working artist, Gatten sees himself as a part of such a community. All four completed sections of the *Secret History* project—the title film, *Secret History of the Dividing Line* (2002); *The Great Art of Knowing*; *Moxon's Mechanick Exercises, or the Doctrine of Handy-works Applied to the Art of Printing* (1999); and *The Enjoyment of Reading, Lost and Found* (2001)—are silent, serenely paced, spiritually evocative experiences; and the earliest of these films to be completed, *Moxon's Mechanick Exercises*, focuses specifically on the Gutenberg Bible.

The other, non-spiritual sense of "antinomian" is equally important for understanding Gatten's films. The *Secret History* project accommodates filmmaking approaches that have often been understood as oppositional. During the late 1960s and early 70s the film artists identified with what P. Adams Sitney called "structural film" seemed to abjure the forms of personal expression evident in the psychodramas of the 40s and 50s and in the expressionist cinema of Stan Brakhage after the late 50s (and of filmmakers influenced by Brakhage: Carolee Schneemann and Dorsky, for example). Michael Snow, Hollis Frampton, Ernie Gehr, Paul Sharits, and others seemed to critique personal cinema, to question the very idea of the personal and to be bent on replacing "the personal clutter/the persistence of feelings/the hand-touch sensibility/the diaristic indulgence/the painterly mess/the dense gestalt/the primitive techniques" (Schneemann's description of a structuralist filmmaker's objections to her work, from *Kitch's Last Meal* [1978], reprinted in *More Than Meat Joy* [New Paltz: Documentext, 1979]: 238) with rigorous, formal, highly intellectual approaches to shooting and editing, approaches

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The Great Art of Knowing (2004): William Byrd bookplate.

Courtesy David Gatten

that allowed for in-depth theoretical considerations of the nature of cinema itself.

The films in Gatten's *Secret History* project incorporate both approaches within an aesthetic that is rigorous but not rigid, subtly expressive but not self-involved. For example, *Secret History of the Dividing Line* is rigorously structured *and* it incorporates a "hand-touch sensibility." Like each of the subsequent films in the project, the title film is divided into a brief introduction and three sections, each of which is organized mathematically (Gatten describes some of the details in the interview). The first section begins with what appears to be a scratch down the center of the filmstrip (it was actually made by painstakingly tearing the filmstrip in two, then reassembling it), which leads into a series of visual texts: a timeline of dates of important historical and cultural events leading up to and away from the life of William Byrd II of colonial Virginia, who founded the city of Richmond; led the surveying party that drew the boundary (the "dividing line") between Virginia and North Carolina; wrote one of the first detailed descriptions of American nature, *History of the Dividing Line* (written soon after the surveying expedition, but not published until 1841); and assembled one of the largest libraries in colonial North America. After the sequence of dates, the "scratch" divides the frame in two, revealing on one side passages from Byrd's official *History* of the drawing of the Virginia/North Carolina boundary, and on the other side comparable passages from his secret history of the same events, written before the official history and circulated privately to other colonial gentlemen. Gatten's work with visual text, along with his precise, mathematical organization, recalls Frampton's *Zorns Lemma* (1970), while the "scratch" evokes the many filmmakers who have worked expressively directly on the filmstrip (Douglas Crockwell, Len Lye, Harry Smith, Brakhage, Schneemann, Lawrence Brose, Carl E. Brown, Jennifer Todd Reeves).

Throughout the *Secret History* project, Gatten confirms and expands his synthesis of the intellectual and the emotional, of representation and abstraction, of image and text, of the public and the personal, and of colonial history and modern art practice. Each of the films in the *Secret History* project focuses on a variety of cultural artifacts that Gatten's research has led him to, many of them books that were part of William Byrd's library; and each evokes the accomplishments of many avant-garde filmmakers as well as of other moving-image artists. The *Secret History* project is not a critique of earlier cinematic accomplishments, the way "structural film" was a critique of "personal cinema," the way feminist filmmaking of the 1980s was a critique of what had been a male-dominated field, and the way much of the handmade, hand-processed avant-garde cinema of recent years is a critique of both the commercialism of industrial cinema and the pretensions of earlier generations of avant-garde filmmakers. Rather, Gatten's project is a *gentle* iconoclasm, less a critique than a celebratory synthesis of the history and diversity of independent cinema, and, more generally, a meditation on the long, sometimes glorious, often troubled history of experimental cultural production and accumulation.

The following conversation with Gatten was recorded in August of 2006 and has been refined online.

Scott MacDonald: **I've always assumed a connection between your major multipartite [*Secret History*] project and Frampton's seven-part *Hapax Legomena,* or perhaps with his Magellan project. I'm thinking about the idea of a multipartite work that reaches out not just to *film* history but to social history, art history, poetic history—all these other realms. And I'm wondering whether you conceived *Secret History* as a multipartite project.**

David Gatten: In 1994 I found my way to Frampton's *Circles of Confusion* [*Circles of Confusion: Film/Photography/Video, Texts 1968–1980* (Rochester: Visual Studies Workshop, 1983)], which was huge for me. Frampton's approach to history and art, the mode of inquiry, especially in his writing, became an operating principle for me. In particular, "Incisions in History/Segments of Eternity," where he tells the story about Craig Breedlove, became my touchstone. Breedlove built a car to break the world land-speed record, a car that crashed, though Breedlove wasn't seriously injured. According to Frampton, the crash took exactly 8.7 seconds to occur, and when Breedlove was interviewed immediately afterward about what he thought and did during those nine seconds, he talked for an hour and a half! Frampton does this wonderful conceptual riff with recorded time versus lived experience. And I was *completely* captivated by this—and then did research on Breedlove. I actually got hold of the film footage of the crash (there was a camera in the car). My plan was to try and get the entire interview and slow down the nine seconds of footage so that it lasted ninety minutes. I didn't do that project; instead I made a three-projector piece using that footage—my first use of 16mm. But, more important, that Frampton essay sent me to the library and I've been there ever since.

When I started what evolved into the *Secret History* project, I didn't actually know I was making a film, much less a cycle of films. I didn't know *what* I was doing. The same week I was at the beach doing the first section of *What the Water Said* [1997], I was reading a Susan Howe book, *Frame Structures* [Susan Howe, *Frame Structures: Early Poems 1974–1979* (New York: New Directions, 1996)]. I had been introduced to Howe by one of my friends at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, where I got my MFA, who knew of my interest in *Circles of Confusion*. In *Frame Structures*, which contained reprints of some of Howe's early work, the final section is called *Secret History of the Dividing Line*. I found it fascinating. Howe draws mostly from a book her father wrote on Oliver Wendell Holmes; it's called *Touched by Fire* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1946].

Also at that time, I was working with black leader in a way that had been inspired by Agnes Martin's grid paintings. I had gone to a show of her work in Chicago, thinking, "Oh, she's a minimalist painter, grid, Sol LeWitt . . . ," but I had an amazing experience in actually seeing the *paintings*, as opposed to slides or reproductions in a book. From twenty feet away, one of her grids may appear very regular, but from five feet away, you can tell that they're not really regular, and from *twelve inches* away, you can see that the grids on these large eight-foot-by-eight-foot canvases are constructed with a twelve-inch ruler: she's drawing a line and moving the ruler, drawing a line and moving the ruler; and so there are slight discrepancies, "imperfections," in the grid, which, close up, you can see is incredibly irregular and that Martin is in fact not simply a minimalist, but an abstract expressionist of a certain sort. That was exciting to me.

At the time I went to that show, this simple repetitive process seemed like such a healthy thing to do, and I wondered, "What might that repetitive process be *in film*?" Well, I was very interested in splicing, and was already working with cement splices, and I realized that splices are comparable to Martin's lines. Now, if you make a perfect splice between black leader and black leader, you won't see that splice; there will be no splice line at all; but since my splicer was slightly out of alignment, my splices weren't invisible; this strip of leader was filled with these very small white lines. If you held the edited strip of leader eighteen inches from you, they looked like very uniform lines, but when I put the filmstrip on an optical printer and started looking at the individual splices, each one was incredibly different. I started filming the individual splices on the optical printer. I really zoomed in on them, and I'd let them last on screen for seven seconds, ten seconds. Each image was a unique object, as opposed to a uniform machine-made thing. I made hundreds of these images.

Is this what we're seeing in the third section of the title film, *Secret History of the Dividing Line*?

Yes. The white area on screen is where the blade irregularly scraped off all of the emulsion or into the celluloid base itself. Also, the cement forms bubbles, which you can see. At the beginning, I thought this was just a completely formal process, just a way of really looking at splices. Six months or so later, I saw that Howe book and thought, "Wow, 'secret history of the dividing line'; the splice is a dividing line that's supposed to be invisible; it's what's been repressed . . . I'm going to steal that title! But maybe I should figure out what *her* title refers to." In the acknowledgments in *Frame Structures* Howe reveals that the source for her title is two texts by William Byrd II of colonial Virginia: *History of the Dividing Line* . . . and *The Secret History of the Line*. I decided to read these books. The governor of Virginia had asked Byrd to write up an official account of the expedition, and that's

The Enjoyment of Reading, Lost and Found (2001): circles of confusion, text of light (left), sonnet by Michael Drayton. Courtesy David Gatten

where the *History of the Dividing Line, Run in the Year 1728* comes from.

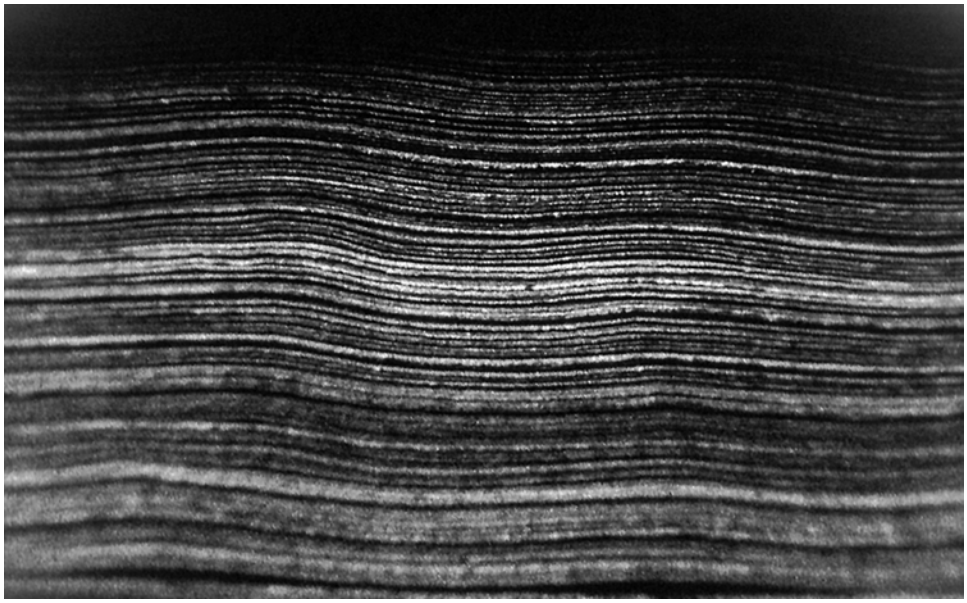
The "secret history" was a genre at the time. Byrd had other secret histories in his library. Secret histories were almost always parodies or satirical sketches that circulated privately, among friends. In *The Secret History of the Line*, Byrd names himself "Steddy"; he envisions himself as the steady one, the sensible one, and he is very biting in his commentary on the party from North Carolina. There was great rivalry between Virginia and North Carolina, and Byrd thought the North Carolinians were a bunch of buffoons.

When I read the official history and then the secret history of the drawing of the boundary between North Carolina and Virginia, I realized that I *recognized* some of the areas that Byrd describes. As a kid at summer camp, I did a lot of inner-tubing and rafting on the Dan River; the western part of the line in the Byrd expedition crosses the Dan River several times. Byrd's descriptions of the landscape and the river were so clear that I often knew (or imagined I knew) *exactly* where he was—I have very vivid memories of that river. It was a powerful experience to read that text and realize that it looks almost the same now as it looked three hundred years ago!

I continued to read as much about Byrd as I could and eventually got to the story of his library. In his time Byrd was most widely known for his library—his four thousand volumes were one of the two largest colonial libraries (only Cotton Mather's may have been larger)—and the fact that he let people borrow his books. Byrd had inherited books from his father, but every time he went back to England he would return with many more. Thomas Jefferson ended up with a number of Byrd's books, and *Jefferson's* library became the Library of Congress, so Byrd's library in some way serves not only as the site for the transfer of European intellectual and philosophical and religious thought to North America, but as the foundation of our national library.

The fact of Byrd's library was interesting to me, but what *really* hooked me was a 1958 article from the American Antiquarian Society journal by Edwin Wolf, who details his ten-year search to try and find Byrd's books. William Byrd II died in 1744; his son, William Byrd III, squandered the family fortune and committed suicide on 1 January 1777; and in order to pay the debts off, his widow had to auction off the library. A catalog was assembled. It didn't just list the books, but preserved the location of the books on the shelves, so we can see not only what Byrd collected, but how he thought about bodies of knowledge. There was no Dewey Decimal System at the time; Byrd's way of putting things together tells us something about his thinking. I thought that was very exciting.

By this time, all these forms of division, and all these collections and connections, were coming together. There was the division of landscape through exploration, and the various reasons for dividing the two states: the official reason—the efficient collection of taxes by the British government—and the secret reason: the politics of colonies wanting access to intra-coastal waterways in order to get around the British trade tariffs for the shipping of tobacco. The drawing of the line between North Carolina and Virginia created a new relationship that then bound the separated parts together in a new way. There were also the library and the auction as sites of collection and division. That library is still together on paper, even though it's been physically divided: the books are dispersed all over the world. And I was thinking about the *cinematic* dividing line (and conjunction): the splice, which defines duration and creates our temporal experience of film. So at that point, I thought, "Okay, I want to do something with all this." I didn't want to just make a formal or a structural film, but to work with the documents



The Enjoyment of Reading: book as strata.

Courtesy David Gatten

and with history and bring in all of these other things I was excited about into a single work. I didn't know exactly what to do, but Frampton's writing was serving as something of a guide.

The splices that you optically printed were the germ of the *Secret History* project and the central section of your *Secret History of the Dividing Line,* but the film in which those splices appear wasn't the first of these films you finished.

No. My working in the library first resulted in *Moxon's Mechanick Exercises, or, the Doctrine of Handy-works Applied to the Art of Printing*. One of the books from Byrd's library, by Joseph Moxon, was the first manual of style for printers. I wanted to let this interesting text rub up against something else, specifically the Gutenberg Bible. The Gutenberg Bible represents that moment where the word and The Word become culturally fixed in a new way; it's a point of transition from scribal reproduction to mechanical reproduction. I decided to use the Joseph Moxon text as a source for instructions on how to recompose the Gutenberg Bible material that I'd collected by using cellophane tape to "translate" text from the pages of different translations of the Bible onto a strip of plastic that can move through a projector. My process involves putting scotch tape down over a text or an image in a book and boiling the paper away so that the glue from the tape soaks up the ink and can then be contact printed onto high-contrast stock, which creates a negative; then I edit that negative in A, B, C, D rolls and sometimes optically print some of the material to slow it down and change the rhythm.

Working that way is very much like a kid using silly putty to lift images from the comics and then being able to stretch characters' faces. For *Moxon's Mechanick Exercises*, I let Moxon direct: I made an interpretation of Moxon's instructions for a typesetter and applied them to the material I had collected. I thought, "Okay, Moxon says this; that means I should do *this* with these captured texts," and the result would affect the visual layering or the pacing, or the size of the translated texts in the film.

Translation, in the most conventional sense and in other senses too, had become a central interest. I looked at and worked with five different translations of the Bible, thinking about those translations alongside the two different Byrd histories, the secret history and the official history: that is, the "translation" of Byrd's experiences into one form, then another. I was also interested in the general politics of translation: the issue of access to the Bible, and how the control of the information in the Bible evolved.

To what extent does your going back to that Gutenberg moment relate to the current transformation from mechanical technologies to all the new digital technologies?

I see it as a *direct* relationship. I was trying to address that very issue. After the Gutenberg printing press, and the Gutenberg Bible, the *text* was fixed, but *meaning* was *unfixed*. The dissemination of texts gave way to the proliferation of interpretations. Books were still very expensive, but far less so than when they were reproduced by hand, so more people had the opportunity to interpret the Bible and other writings as well. In the late 1990s, similar things were happening; everyone was very excited about digital technology and the ways in which it was unfixing traditional text and texts. This was the moment after analog video, when digital video was starting up, and it seemed as if DV was going to answer every-

one's questions about access to the means of reproduction. I thought, "Well, maybe if I can go back to this earlier transition in print culture, I'll be able to learn some things." At that point there weren't specific answers that I was hoping to pull out of the older material; it was just my way of thinking through these huge cultural changes.

I finished *Moxon's Mechanick Exercises* in 1999. By that point I was committed to a larger Byrd project because I'd read about his daughter, Evelyn, and her love affair with Charles Mordant. That story gave the Byrd saga an entirely new dimension. Some of what has come down to us about Evelyn is the stuff of legend. But it does seem clear that she went to England in 1723 and met this man who was the grandson of the Third Earl of Peterborough, Byrd's main political rival in England at the time. The Peterboroughs were Catholic; the Byrds were Protestant. Evelyn's father found out about the budding romance, and Evelyn was shipped back to Virginia, where she refused to see suitors. It turns out that she carried on a secret nine-year transatlantic correspondence with Mordant, who eventually travels to the colonies under an assumed name and infiltrates Virginia society. Evelyn and Charles make secret plans to elope, but they're betrayed by Byrd's secretary. The ship sails with Mordant tied up on it; Evelyn is prevented from going aboard. And during that voyage the ship goes down; everyone aboard is lost. Evelyn is heartbroken; she confesses to her friend that she feels that she can't go on, and two weeks later she dies, at age 29, of *heart failure*. And the following spring, in 1738, the first of seventeen recorded sightings of her ghost is reported.

I thought, "Wow." Here was an epic story, and a tragic love story, again about *division*—they're apart for nine years (their only communication is through letters that are carried back and forth by hand); they're divided by the ocean and by religion, but connected by text. It was becoming obvious that I couldn't fit all of what I was learning about the Byrds into the little splice-line film I was working on. By this time I'd also decided that the splice-line film was going to be about the landscapes of Virginia and North Carolina—because to me the individual splices had begun to look like landscapes. I was realizing that I might need to make a love-story film and ghost-story film. But then even that wasn't enough. I started to think about other aspects of the Byrd history that needed to be addressed if I were going to create some real sense of its many dimensions. I continued and continue to find the Byrd library fascinating. In 1997 a scholarly edition of an early catalog, meticulously annotated and researched by Kevin Hayes, appeared. It's fascinating reading; I open it up all the time, just to read the titles and descriptions of Byrd's books.

In the summer of 2001 I took a trip to try and find the fifty-seven locations that Byrd lists in the appendix of his *History*, and sure enough, many of them were still there with the same names. The border has shifted—Virginia has steadily gotten smaller; there were later border-drawing expeditions that enlarged North Carolina—so most of the 1728 dividing line is now in North Carolina, but I could find these places, and Ariana Hamidi and I spent three weeks camping along the dividing line and shot a lot of film. There will be two expedition films: the title film of the cycle, and another (it'll be the eighth in the cycle) that will revisit the expedition with imagery of those points that are the abstractly envisioned by the splices in *Secret History of the Dividing Line*.

One of the central dialectics in that film is straight lines of either logic or geography versus the curvilinear reality of life. As we read the list of places where the surveying group stops, we cross many winding rivers, including the Dan. It's also interesting how the names on the list reflect a particular historical moment in the process of the settling of Virginia. Right after the location "Indian Trading Path," we move into a long section of Indian names. There are clearly English names imposed on the landscape at the beginning, then there are Indian names, and then at the end we go back to a preponderance of English names.

The surveyors went about 240 miles from Currituck Inlet across North Carolina, about two-thirds of the way across the state as it now exists. In the European-settled areas on the coast the Native American names had been replaced by European names, then there was an unpopulated area or certainly a much less densely populated area in and around the Dismal Swamp where the group had Native American guides, so the names they were being told were the ones used by Native Americans. Then when they got further inland, into the piedmont area, the party just started naming things themselves. Certain places are named for members of the expedition; the Mayo River, for instance, is named after William Mayo.

What you said about the straight line versus the curved line was important to me throughout the film, which begins with the jagged line within the more uniform borders of the film frame and the "lines" of texts. I do love the idea that the surveyors are trying to go straight across something that is not straight and that that is then inscribed in the appendix as a *list*—another kind of line.

Conceptually, *Secret History of the Dividing Line* reminds me of Frampton's *Gloria!* [1979] I assume that's a film you know.

Gloria! is actually my very favorite film. But I have never thought about it in direct relation to *Secret History of the Dividing Line*.

What *Gloria!* does with beginnings and endings—literal, historical, material—you do with the idea of the *line*.

Within the structure of the larger *Secret History* project, at least as you envision it now, *The Enjoyment of Reading* is the fourth film, but it was the second one you finished. When we showed it at Hamilton College, it struck me that the opening texts were particularly hard to read. Did you mean for those texts to be right at the edge of readability?

I'm always wanting things to be at different degrees of legibility, to pose different challenges for the viewer/reader, and I did want to start the film with something that was quite thin. Part of the difficulty in this instance is a function of the font that I chose: it made certain parts of the letters *very* thin, and in some prints of the film and in certain projection situations, maybe too thin. I think if I had it to do over, I would make those texts somewhat more legible. Because I make these films on rewinds I never know *exactly* what I'm going to end up with until the film is finished.

In the long first section, it looks as if we're looking at microfilm. Were you actually filming off a microfilm reader or . . .

No, again I'm using my cellophane-tape transfer process: lifting text from a book and "translating" it to celluloid. I had gone through the original catalog of Byrd's library and had copied down a couple hundred titles. I made transparency slides of eighty-one (I often make slides of images, and put them on a lightbox as a way of thinking about how to arrange them), but then decided to film the *slides* themselves. I took the gate off the optical printer, and put each slide where normally you would have the neutral density filter and then filmed the slide, racking in and out of focus. So, no, they're not actually from microfilm, but I did intend to reproduce something of my experience of sorting through both microfilms and card catalogs in archives and to evoke the sense you have when you do that kind of research of there being so much material, some of which you glance at, some of which you read carefully, much of which you can't absorb, and some of which you first go past, then find yourself drawn back to. The series of descriptions of books in this section of *The Enjoyment of Reading* works in a similar way to the timeline at the beginning of *Secret History of the Dividing Line* in that there are certain moments of focus within a wash of information.

In the second section we get the color passage, identified as "emblems of love, that she [Evelyn Byrd] made while waiting, always waiting." There are two parts to this passage; a blueish first section that is quite abstract, then a somewhat less abstract section of lovely out-of-focus imagery of light through leaves blowing in the wind. In both sections, your focus creates dots or circles of light. What exactly are we looking at there?

In both sections you're seeing a blue, foil-wrapped candle. At the beginning you're seeing, in extreme close-up, the tip of the candle, and there is one flash when the wick actually comes into focus. The tip of the candle was filmed with extension tubes, which magnify imagery; basically you're seeing the sun glinting off the blue foil and creating "circles of confusion." I was moving the camera very slightly, just shaking it basically. For a moment, a bit of cobweb is visible between the wick and the edge of the candle, and then I pull back and you see that the candle is in the window, within more "circles of confusion."

I think of that image as one of the iconic images of a lover waiting: you put the candle in the window to signal to your beloved.

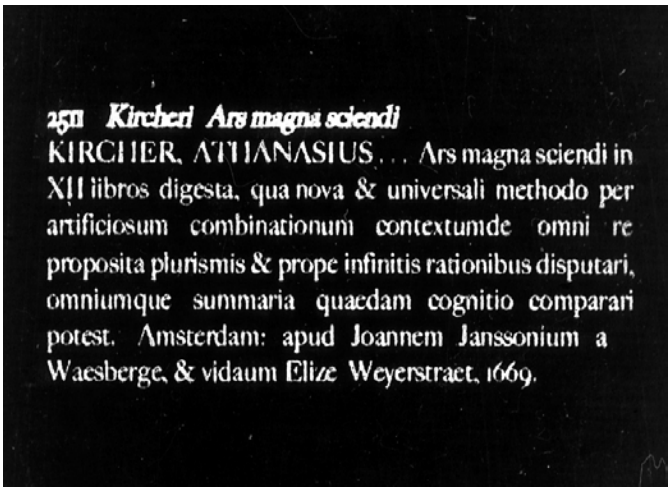
Your alluding to Frampton's *Circles of Confusion* just now is interesting, given that this particular section is very Brakhage-ian. It strikes me that one of the things that you're attempting to do in the larger *Secret History* project is to bring together various supposedly oppositional avant-garde practices. At one point, Brakhage and Frampton were thought to be at opposite ends of at least one independent filmmaking axis: Brakhage was personal and romantic, Frampton detached and intellectual. Did you have both Frampton and Brakhage in mind as you were making this passage?

Well, when I was looking through the camera and realized that what was coming and going were "circles of confusion," of course, I thought of Frampton. But further, I had begun *The Enjoyment of Reading* (I already had the title for the film) with text after text, with a lot of reading from texts that I conjectured were of particular interest to *William* Byrd. For the second section I wanted to shift the focus of the film into *Evelyn's* space, into color and into what I considered to be a different kind of "reading": a reading of "the text of light." I was thinking very specifically about Brakhage's *The Text of Light* [1974] and also about the way the kinds of images in the Brakhage film and in this section of this film might be conditioned by the seven or eight minutes of literary text that have come before them; what kind of new space would open up visually, physiologically, conceptually, when we went from black-and-white letters to a color image—that was very much on my mind.

In the third section of *The Enjoyment of Reading*, little shards of text at the bottom of the frame allude in one way or another to the various stories in the project, and then we see several images of a decaying book; I can't read the title.

That was *Religion of Nature Delineated* by William Wollaston, the first of Byrd's books that I was able to film, at the Virginia Historical Society in Richmond, something I was very excited about. This was in 2001, right when I was starting to understand that this was a project about the Byrds. I had made *Moxon's Mechanick Exercises* and had been doing a lot of research in Chicago, but this was the first time I went down to Virginia.

Religion of Nature Delineated was a very fragile book, so fragile that they only let it out of the archive once every five years, so we (Ariana had agreed to assist me) felt lucky to



The Great Art of Knowing: Byrd library catalog entry (left). *Moxon's Mechanick Exercises, or the Doctrine of Handy-works Applied to the Art of Printing* (1999): bible pages. Courtesy David Gatten

have this opportunity. The staff there, all of whom were very nice and supportive of the project, brought the book out and we filmed it, after which they took it back into the archive, and we thought, "Wow, that's gone for five years!" When we got back to the camera, we realized that we'd not removed the 85B orange color-correction filter for tungsten film. We'd been shooting in black-and-white Tri-X, and that meant the exposure had been off by almost a stop and a half. We went back to the counter and said, "Um, can we have that book back one more time?" And they were so sweet, they brought it back out, and we filmed it again—but now nobody will see that book for *ten* years. We were embarrassed about that.

You include a sonnet from Michael Drayton and give us time to read it; did you choose it because it's something Evelyn read?

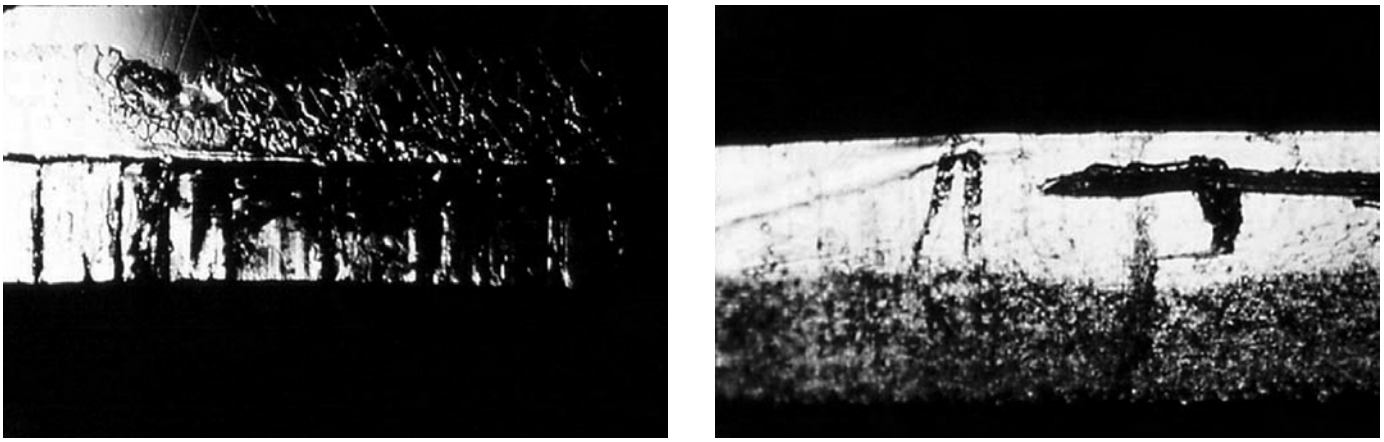
I chose that particular sonnet because it fits the theme of the entire project. All of the films are explorations of different kinds of division and I'm especially interested in the kinds of *division* that create *relationships* that make it hard to take things apart. Drawing the dividing line through the land separated North Carolina from Virginia, but also created a social, economic, political relationship between the two colonies. For me, that line resonates with the idea of Evelyn Byrd and Charles Mordant being separated by an ocean in a way that seems to have strengthened their bond. The Drayton sonnet is about the complexity of separation and the fact that to separate from a lover is not simply to divide from another, but from a part of oneself. For me the ideas in that sonnet are at the emotional center of the entire *Secret History* project.

When I saw *The Great Art of Knowing*, I realized that I was (finally!) getting to understand your larger project.

That was true for me too! I had been making each of these films separately. I knew they were part of a series, but when I started making *The Great Art of Knowing*, I began to see new connections between the films and how I could actually knit those connections together. When I first started working with the material that becomes the central section of *The Great Art of Knowing*, I didn't think I was making a Byrd film. I had seen the exhibition of Leonardo's drawings at the Metropolitan Museum in New York in February 2003 and was *really* taken with his handwriting, partly because it's mirror-writing. Also, I noticed that whenever he was exploring something, he would write *and* he would draw in the margins; and the line between writing and drawing is very hazy in a lot of what he did—or at least it was for me because I couldn't read the handwriting. I decided I wanted to work with this text in the same way I worked with the Bible texts in *Moxon's Mechanick Exercises*: I wanted to lift the text from the pages; and I wanted to explore the lines of text and of the drawings as shapes that evoke language without revealing specific meanings: I wanted to think about the idea that, in order to *understand* something, you have to have both language *and* image.

I was particularly interested in the *Codex on the Flight of Birds* where Leonardo was trying to understand how flight was possible and how to make a flying machine. I thought I was going to be making a Leonardo film, but then it dawned on me that I was working with *birds* again. In his time, there were many puns on William Byrd's name (his nickname was "the Black Swan") and much involvement with birds: he built a garden to attract hummingbirds; he was a birdwatcher; and he wrote about birds. Also, Evelyn drew pictures of birds. So my experiments became a Byrd film, as well as a bird film.

Also, I already knew that I was interested in the Athanasius Kircher texts that Byrd had in his library: *The Great Art of Knowing*, *The Great Art of Light and Shadow*, *The Ecstatic Heavenly Journey*. I started reading about Kircher, and somehow I connected the text of *The Great Art of Knowing*, which



Secret History of the Dividing Line (2002): film splices as landscapes. Courtesy David Gatten

is sometimes referred to as the first book of symbolic logic, to Leonardo's attempt to understand flight. How is it, after all, that we can understand something? Everyone who I was reading at that moment was an empiricist of some sort, believing that through our *senses* we can accumulate knowledge. I started collecting different people who were looking at birds and trying to understand flight, and, of course, in time that brought me to Marey. Leonardo and Marey became my parentheses around five hundred years of people looking at and trying to understand the flight of birds.

A question about the exhibition of the films in the *Secret History* project. *Moxon's Mechanick Exercises* and *The Enjoyment of Reading* are meant to be shown at eighteen frames per second, but *Secret History of the Dividing Line* and *The Great Art of Knowing* at twenty-four frames per second. Given the difficulty of showing at silent speed these days, why did you choose it for the first two films you finished?

With *Moxon's Mechanick Exercises* I chose eighteen frames per second because I wanted the subtle flicker that the slower speed creates, and I wanted that text to move slowly. When I made *The Enjoyment of Reading*, I decided the project was going to stay at eighteen, but I gradually realized that this decision was creating a serious problem for most anyone wanting to show the films; it's hard enough to find 16mm projectors these days, much less projectors that can show at eighteen frames per second. So I've changed to twenty-four.

Can you talk a bit more about the remaining films in the cycle?

Another big film that *has* to be done involves the division of labor on Byrd's plantation: slavery. Byrd owned thirteen other people, and that's partly why he could *buy* all these books and spend so much time reading them. I knew I wanted to do a film on that, but for a long time didn't know how, because there were no books in his library about slavery. But then I found *Halfpenny's Principles of Architecture*, about how to most efficiently design your plantation—so division of *space* as it effects and conditions and produces the division of labor became my way into dealing with slavery and race. There's good imagery in the architectural plans, including an image of the great house and its subordinate dependencies. That'll be the seventh film, *Halfpenny's Principles of Architecture*.

The ninth and final film, *The Ecstatic Heavenly Journey*, will be the ghost story.

What's the next film you plan to complete?

The next one will be the fifth film, which will use Robert Boyle's *Occasional Reflections upon Several Subjects* from the Byrd library as a guiding text. The Boyle book is going to be colliding with *The Book of White Magic*, published in the 1920s, basically to help unhappy women make sense of their lives. The book provides ninety-five different questions; you choose a question and then close your eyes and point to a table of symbols and then use a grid to tell you what page to turn to, and the book will answer your question. The questions are wonderful and very poetic, and if you read down a page of answers, it's a fantastic poem.

Sounds like the *I Ching*.

Very much. So *Gadbury's Doctrine of Nativities, containing the whole Art of Directions and annual Revolutions: whereby, any man (even of an ordinary capacity) may be enabled to discover the most remarkable and occult Incidents of His Life* will be the next film.

SCOTT MACDONALD is the author of *A Critical Cinema: Interviews with Independent Filmmakers*, now in five volumes from University of California Press, and of *Canyon Cinema: The Life and Times of an Independent Film Distributor* (University of California Press, 2007). He teaches at Hamilton College and Harvard University.

ABSTRACT Scott MacDonald talks with filmmaker David Gatten about his multi-film exploration of the life and times of colonial Virginian William Byrd II, *Secret History of the Dividing Line, A True Account in Nine Parts*, in which Gatten considers the development of print culture, the arrival of digital, and the material nature of cinema.

KEYWORDS avant-garde film, North American colonial life, filmmaker-as-bibliophile, filmmaking-as-research, text-as-image

LONDON AVANT-GARDE ROUND-UP

NICKY HAMLYN SURVEYS ARTISTS' FILM AND VIDEO SHOWN IN A VARIETY OF SPACES IN THE U.K. CAPITAL, 2006–07

From 1966 until the late 1990s, the London Filmmakers' Co-op (LFMC), was the main umbrella organization for artists' film in the city. The LFMC was closely associated with "Structural/Materialist" filmmaking (Peter Gidal's politicized formulation, coined in opposition to P. Adams Sitney's "structural film"), but was in fact not so monolithic as is sometimes supposed. During its lifetime the LFMC inhabited a number of semi-permanent spaces in north London, the last of which had been a railway workers' social club. This had two large, flexible rooms for exhibition and several smaller ones housing offices, laboratory, and editing tables.

The LFMC survived on income generated from membership fees, black-and-white processing charges, equipment hire, and cinema entrance fees, as well as from modest grants. In 1997 it moved to a new building in the soon-to-be-fashionable area of Hoxton, on the borders of east London. Soon after the move, the LFMC merged with London Electronic Arts, its video counterpart, and become the Lux. By this time an increasing amount of moving-image work, mostly video, was appearing in commercial galleries (the Lux had its own gallery as well as a purpose-built cinema). In 2001, as a combined result of income-generation problems and a massive rent hike, the Lux building closed (see www.lux.org.uk/featured/closure.htm). In many ways, particularly in its treatment of visitors as consumers, the Lux was a negation of the LFMC, which had been run by and for its membership.

Since the Lux's demise, the film and video scene in London has dispersed. There are now numerous screening venues, galleries, production and research centres, and archives. The Lux itself has re-emerged as a slimmed-down distribution agency with a small but regularly used screening space.

The ill-fated Hoxton adventure reflects the way in which the workshop philosophy of the LFMC has given ground to an art-world model of exhibition in commercial galleries or public museums. The increasing appearance of 16mm film projections in galleries has helped to perpetuate the debate about the differences between filmmakers who show in dedicated spaces and so-called gallery artists who make conventional single-screen films—essentially cinematic works—yet show them as loops on film projectors and sell copies in limited editions (as with Rosalind Nashashibi's work, discussed below).

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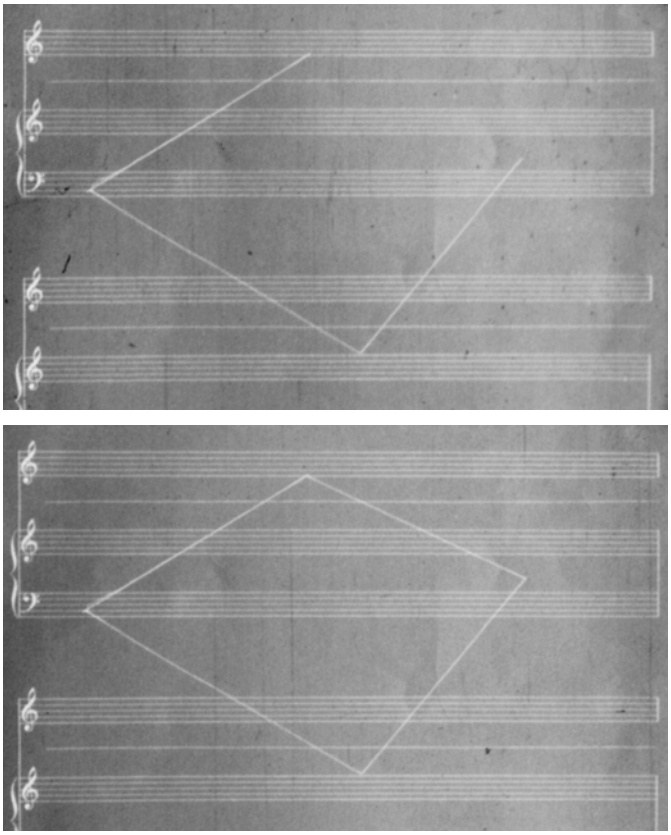
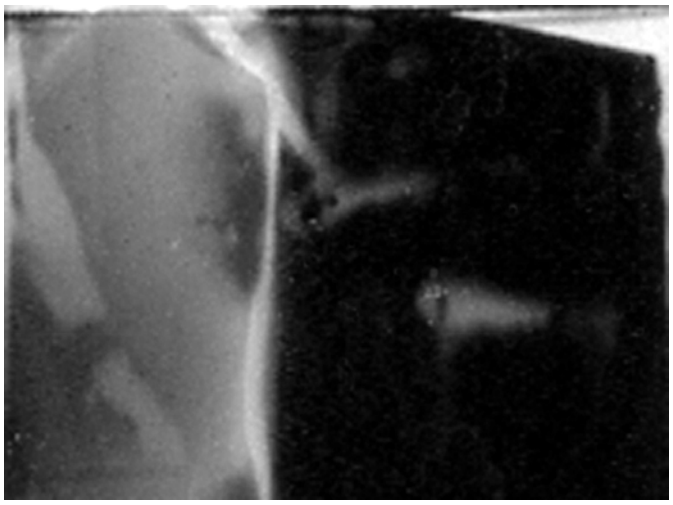
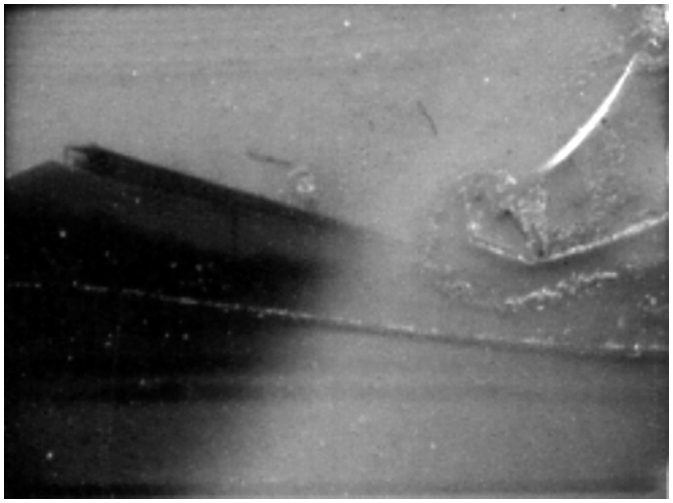
LIGHT READING SERIES, KINGSGATE GALLERY, 31 JANUARY 2007

As a student, **Jennifer Nightingale** made a series of films in which she turned Super 8 film cartridges into pinhole cameras. The film was cranked through these cameras with



Ruth Proctor, *Drawing Loop* (2007). © Ruth Proctor (Hollybush Gardens)





Jennifer Nightingale, *Dancing* (2007), *Car* (2007).

© Jennifer Nightingale

Hélène Martin, untitled work-in-progress.

© Hélène Martin

a hairgrip. One was shot in Canterbury Cathedral, so that the light entering the stained-glass windows is turned from an image into a kind of analytical record of the cranking process. This is not a reductive move: the image preserves, albeit in abstract form, the illuminative and jewel-like character of its source. Although the interest in process described above is characteristic of Nightingale's work, she is equally concerned with the representation of movement, and the way our understanding of kinds of movement can be revised and extended by the way films are shot and constructed.

At the Light Reading event, Nightingale juxtaposed sequences of dance with film of cooking and automobile engine-repair work, activities which are not that distinct from dance in terms of the muscle memory and motor skills acquired through repeated action. Unlike dance, they generate inadvertently aesthetic events that Nightingale claims as aesthetic. The process of turning these activities into a form of dance is achieved through looping short sections of movement. The dancer's moves are similarly looped, suggesting an order of equivalence. However, whereas the moves in the cookery and car-repair sections are largely defined by the beginning and end points of the loop, the dancer's moves have a pre-existing form, defined by the repertoire of steps from which a dance is compounded. In this case, Nightingale deploys a range of editing options, from conforming to the existing pattern of movements, to cutting into, and thereby fragmenting and redefining them.

Ruth Procter's *Drawing Loop* (2007) is based around animated musical notation, so that a score comes into being on the screen, and an equivalence is established between the musical score and film as a form of visual music (in terms of rhythmical duration). There is a clear relationship here to her previous work, in which the shadows cast by objects onto paper are recorded as drawings. **Hélène Martin**'s *Running Time* (2007) involved the reworking of found film fragments, subjecting them to an array of filtering, printing, photochemical, and graphic processes that also connect to drawing and painting. These two young artists are exploring ways of work-

ing with the medium that seeks a bottom-up understanding of film as "light play" or as drawing with light, in the tradition of Man Ray and Fernand Leger's films of the 1920s. Their work demonstrates an approach to film as a process in which forms and strategies figure and refer back to film's light-sensitive, photochemical constitution, in which shadows, light, and objects are in a dynamic, non-hierarchical tension. The artisanal way of working, involving hand-processing and/or developing and printing 16mm using artist-run laboratory facilities represents a return to LFMC-style practices.

It is interesting to ponder the reasons behind the increasing popularity of an activity that is demanding, messy, and laborious: an activity, moreover, that digital image manipulation had seemed to have definitively displaced. The enthusiasm of students for direct animation (drawing or scratching on celluloid) and hand-processing, indeed for the simple physicality of handling a medium whose images are always visible, perhaps reflects a yearning for a direct engagement with the physical world in order to produce artifacts: a yearning for craft. This is notable despite the fact that most students of video in the U.K. come from courses in which electronic media are pervasive. Fewer and fewer come through traditional foundation courses, with their stress on the physically engaged processes of drawing, painting, collage, and sculpture. Many students, of course, are deterred by the cost and difficulties of working with film. A small but significant number nevertheless persevere with it.

WEB LINKS FOR SHOWS DISCUSSED IN THIS ARTICLE

Light Reading, 31 January 2007
www.markwebber.org.uk/2007/01/light-reading-martinnightingaleproctor.html
(see also www.nowhere-lab.org)
China Power Station, Part 1, 8 October–5 November 2006
www.serpentinegallery.org/2006/08/china_power_station_part_i_8_o_1.html
Rosalind Nashashibi, 13 April–27 May 2007
www.chisenhale.org.uk/html/files/exhibition_rosalind_nashashibi__press_release.html
Robert Beavers, 2–25 February 2007
www.tate.org.uk/modern/eventseducation/film/tothewingeddistancefilmsbyrobertbeavers.htm
Ken Jacobs, 3 April 2007
http://www.roxybarandscreen.com/listings.php?event=214
John Porter, 4 February 2007
www.cogcollective.co.uk/february/index.html

CHINA POWER STATION, BATTERSEA POWER STATION, 8 OCTOBER–5 NOVEMBER 2006

The Battersea building, designed by Giles Gilbert-Scott (who also designed the Bankside Power Station, now Tate Modern) is comparable in size to an airport terminal. The exhibition was held on three floors in one of the two turbine halls that sit on either side of the main chamber. The show was divided into three themed rooms: "Memory," "Future," and "Sublime." The most disappointing aspect of the show was that the space was not creatively utilized. None of the pieces was site-specific.

Almost all the work in the show was straightforward, single-screen video, mostly made in the last year or two. The familiar difficulties of showing time-based work in galleries were not only replicated, but aggravated. In each long hall the videos were projected across the width of the space, with variations in presentation at the ends of each room. Strip lighting, sited at shoulder height opposite the row of screens, provided harsh illumination. The bare concrete rooms, unheated and permanently deprived of sunlight, were bitterly cold. No seating was provided. A less conducive environment in which to watch projected DVDs, many of which were long and demanding, could hardly be imagined. Perhaps this did not matter to the visitors, most of whom seemed principally interested in the building.

In his essay in the Battersea catalogue, "Video Art from China," Hou Hanrou asserts that "[u]ncertainty about the outside world and the impossibility of comprehending reality provide opportunities for artists to generate imagery that oscillates between curiosity and desparation, between exaltation and frustration, between pleasure and irony, between humour and helplessness." There is a kind of postmodern defeatism in this statement, licensing artists to give up on the hard task of trying to grasp the nature of rapidly mutating social trends expressed in the activities depicted in their work, retreating instead into a world of depoliticized, subjectivist, or nostalgic video-making. It is arguable that, although the work on show at Battersea has escaped the geographical confines of China, the price has been both a marked lack of political engagement, and a conformity with fashionable trends in international art.

Jia Zhang-ke is well known as a director of feature films, including *Still Life*, which won the Golden Lion at Venice in 2006. Stylistically, his film *Public Space* (2001) was one of the most assured of the works in the exhibition. This slow-paced film consists of long tracking shots, tilts, and pans interspersed

Wang Jian Wei, *Flying Bird is Motionless* (2005). © 2006 Wang Jian Wei

with static views of people in billiard halls, canteens, waiting rooms, and bus stops. A number of images, typically mid-shots of, for example, passengers cramped in a bus, are made with a long lens, compressing the space and exaggerating the sense of crowdedness, while other, less populated shots, are contrastingly wide and spacious. Passengers get onto buses and trains, present tickets to a door woman beside whom sits an enigmatic dandy. The connections between these occurrences may at best be inferred, through a prolonged process of watching. Information is gradually released through occasional close-ups or shots that appear finally to connect spaces together after several minutes of activity.

Most of the subjects would be unaware that they were being filmed, but in a number of instances the camera observes couples embracing or dancing together in such a way that although they must have been aware of the camera they behave as if they are not. This introduces a mode of fiction, or documentary reconstruction, a prearranged pact between filmmaker and subject whose terms are not disclosed to the viewer. There is a contrast with most of the material in the work, which is made without the apparent awareness of its subjects. In order to get the film to work, viewers must fall back on their own resources in order to fill in gaps, and apprehend what it is they are watching—to assimilate it, in other words, to pre-existing bodies of knowledge and structures of understanding. As such, the work can neither challenge those structures nor offer new knowledge or ways of thinking. It is hard not to see this film as an example of aestheticized politics or exoticized daily life, a record of activity in the public sphere from which all political resonance has been excluded. The absence of contextualizing material and the lack of clarity as to the pact between filmmaker and subjects render the latter as mute specimens of the spectator's curious gaze.

Flying Bird is Motionless (2005) by **Wang Jian Wei** stages a kung fu battle as ballet. The work is in studied contrast to the way in which kung fu has been presented in Hong Kong genre movies and in the numerous crossover films of recent years. There is no narrative and only very little, realistically low-key and synchronized sound. Much of the action occurs in a wide-angle top-shot, alternating with eye-level mid-shots. In terms of the color and texture of its light, this film is more theatrical than cinematic; the lighting is not used to define a realistic atmosphere or arena, but rather to create swathes and pools of color keyed around gold and red. The actions

MUSEUMS, GALLERIES, AND OTHER VENUES (1)

www.tate.org.uk
The most high-profile London venue for avant-garde film is the hugely popular **Tate Modern** museum, which houses a cinema auditorium that is for some unknown reason painted fluorescent red (there is a perceptible colored glow during screenings). In 2002, **Stuart Comer** was appointed curator of film and he has done much to boost the program. The most recent retrospectives have focused on Germaine Dulac, Ernie Gehr, and Lotte Reininger. There are also related events such as the Pervasive Animation conference that took place 2–4 March 2007, convened by **Suzanne Buchan** and featuring Tom Gunning, Esther Leslie, Anthony McCall, and Vivian Sobchack. By some feat of digital compression, a video of the entire proceedings is available online: www.tate.org.uk/onlineevents/webcasts/pervasive_animation_across_disciplines/default.jsp. **Tate Britain** also shows regular programs of emerging work by British artists.

www.chisenhale.org.uk
www.ica.org.uk
www.serpentinegallery.org
www.whitechapel.org
The **Chisenhale Gallery**, a non-profit venue, hosted Rosalind Nashashibi's work. At the **Whitechapel Gallery**, also a charitable institution and the recipient of public grants, **Ian White** runs a regular program of artists' film and video. The spectacular location for the China Power Station show was chosen by the **Serpentine Gallery**'s director, **Julia Peyton-Jones**, and co-director **Hans-Ulrich Obrist** as appropriate because contemporary Chinese artists often show in abandoned industrial buildings in China. Obrist is one of a new breed of so-called "über-curators," who assemble conceptually themed mixed shows. The Serpentine has also shown moving-image pieces in its own Kensington Gardens premises, including work by Matthew Barney, 20 September–11 November 2007. The **Institute of Contemporary Arts** has a long history of showing video art in addition, more recently, to showcasing digital art and design.

are quiet, delicate, and soft: the editing is relatively slow-paced, so that actions are not fragmented in the way they are in popular films like *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000), where fast cutting-on-action is deployed to work the illusion that weapons are actually making contact with their target. *Flying Bird is Motionless* offsets kung fu conventions but does little else.

In *Whose Utopia* (2006), **Cao Fei** juxtaposes fascinating, beautifully shot sequences of light bulbs being manufactured in the Siemens Osram factory in Guandong. Much of the process involves meticulous assembly work by numerous individuals. There is a poignancy in the fact that the skills involved are alienated, insofar as they form a mere part of a semi-automated production line. Presumably Siemens Osram opened a factory here because labor is relatively inexpensive. This is ironic, given Siemens's use of slave labor during World War II. The first half of the film is similar to *Public Space*, in the way it offers uncontextualized footage. In the second half, a ballet dancer appears, performing among the machines and the factory workers, who ignore her as they go about their tasks. It is not clear if the workers are genuinely indifferent to, or too busy to watch, the dancer, or whether they have been asked by the filmmaker (or even ordered by managers) to ignore her. Does her presence symbolize a utopian possibility? Is it a bitter or tantalizing glimpse of some freedom they cannot have? Is it a comment on the introduction of western values into China (European dance forms, German manufacturing procedures)? It may be that the work constitutes a coded critique, its indirectness the most that can be achieved in a country where criticism is risky and censorship prevails, of China's relentless and dehumanizing economic drive for development.

The film that came closest to exploring directly the economic milieu of modern China was **Xu Tang**'s humorous *Music Hall of Zheng Daoxing* (2002–04). Xu Tang performs in a kind of country-and-western band, whose musicians play a variety of western and Chinese instruments. The lyrics, actually a spoken monologue, tell of his efforts to start a variety of businesses, and the difficulties he encounters, including a detailed account of how fuel costs put paid to the haulage business that he had painstakingly built up. The work, which is, strictly speaking, documentary footage of a performance in a small club, wittily combines western and Chinese musical and televisual forms and genres. It was shown in a small side-room, on a TV in front of a sofa that, for some reason, was roped-off so as to be unusable by visitors.

ROSALIND NASHASHIBI, CHISENHALE GALLERY, 13 APRIL–27 MAY 2007

A frequent bugbear of those, myself included, who are committed to the filmmaking tradition exemplified by the LFMC, is that gallery artists, whose careers are nurtured in the art press and by the international network of galleries that sup-

port and show them, often produce work that attains a high profile, yet appears to have been made in ignorance of the experimental film and video-makers whose work often anticipates their own. In the case of the Edinburgh-based rising star **Rosalind Nashashibi**, the winner of the 2003 Becks Futures prize and representative of Scotland at the 2007 Venice Biennale, one would like to know if she has studied films such as Ken Jacobs's *Tom Tom the Piper's Son* (1969), or David Hall's series of *TV Interruptions* (1971) whose exploration of framing as a way of reconfiguring form and meaning are direct precursors of Nashashibi's short film *Eyeballing* (2005).

If *Eyeballing* centers around the way in which framing can come to define or make explicit something that only potentially existed before it was framed, in *Bachelor Machines* (2007) the framing is often wilfully off-center, with the camera cropping or drifting away from its subject. The film takes place on a merchant ship on a voyage from southern Italy to Sweden. Nashashibi followed the cinematic model by handing over sound and camera duties to others. The film is arranged in thirty short "scenes," most of which consist of a single shot, sometimes of crew members playing cards or working on deck, sometimes simply rolling waves or glimpses of landscape. There are also repeated shots of the ship's bridge, focusing on video screens and navigation equipment. There is no commentary and the Italian dialogue is mostly inaudible. (In its careful omission of contextual information the film shares a lot with some of the Chinese work shown at Battersea.) There is a deliberate positioning of the work as surface reflection, avoiding anything that would meaningfully situate the imagery in political, anthropological, or sociological terms. It is as if the filmmaker has embraced positively Brecht's statement, which Walter Benjamin quotes in his 1931 essay "A Small History of Photography": "less than ever does the mere reflection of reality reveal anything about reality."

Bachelor Machines was shown on an underpowered projector in a highly resonant space that muddied both image and sound, but the real problem for this film was its refusal to pursue the implications of its own images.

ROBERT BEAVERS, TATE MODERN, 2–25 FEBRUARY 2007

The longtime companion of Gregory Markopoulos, the Greek American filmmaker who was (until his death in 1992) a key figure in post-war U.S. avant-garde film, **Robert Beavers** was still only a teenager when the pair moved to Europe in 1967. At that time, he had completed only one or two films, but his early short experiments, assembled together and entitled *Early Monthly Segments* (1968–70), are remarkably precocious: technically assured, precisely structured studies of naked figures on rocks, the shadow of the filmmaker cast into frame from off-screen, crossed arms gesturing from a tiny window in a whitewashed wall, sea water disturbed by a dive. The editing draws attention to itself by the way it cuts into an event, fragmenting or curtailing it, by showing the immediate aftermath of an action, by the sheer brevity of a shot, or by its color contrast with its predecessor, blue and white followed by orange and white or gold.

These short films also contain images of the filmmaking process itself, such as Beavers handling strips of 16mm, taping them to a lampshade so as to study them, or holding a lens and tilting it so that the camera can be seen reflected in the front element. He frequently films into mirrors through a hole cut in a sheet of paper, creating multiple layers of actual and reflected imagery. These shots, though, are not consistently reflexive in the way that much structural film builds

Robert Beavers, *The Ground* (1993–2001). © Robert Beavers. Courtesy Temenos Archives

reflexivity into its very forms of presentation. The films also document Beavers's daily life with Markopolous and Tom Chomont, who also appears in scenes shot in Berlin, Zurich, and various parts of Greece. In 2002, Beavers re-edited the *Segments*, incorporating them into larger works of between fifteen and thirty minutes, with sound added. They make up a large cycle of eighteen films entitled *My Hand Outstretched to the Winged Distance and Sightless Measure*.

The later work is more expansive, both in terms of duration and pace, yet still tense and restless in the way a small repertoire of perhaps three or four thematically related subjects will be repetitively rotated, each time with a shift in point of view or a variation in scale. *The Ground* (1993–2001) is composed of a view of a ruined Greek stone windmill, a bent-over figure hewing a rock with a hammer and chisel, and a close-up of a man's hand rhythmically beating his own chest. Less regularly, we see wider shots of the landscape. Despite the easy pace of this film the effect is airless and constricting. Paradoxically perhaps, the earlier *Sequences*, although dense and highly organized, are brief and varied, whereas in the later work the viewer is obliged, through tightly regulated repetition, to submit to the filmmaker's strategies. We are returned over and over again to the same images, organized around themes of making, the made, and its inevitable decay, enforced by the slow rhythm of pounding hammer and fist, with only variations in framing to break the monotony of authorship. Thus, for all their remarkable imagery and ambition, the films leave the viewer little room for maneuver: the space for the imagination and memory to make connections and find echoes among and between shots is often didactically filled. Nevertheless, Beavers's films are notable for their sense of intense concentration, and a self-conscious and sensitive use of the medium that is absent in most gallery-based moving-image work.

KEN JACOBS, ROXY BAR AND SCREEN, 3 APRIL 2007

The work shown, a new video piece, combined the two main strands of **Ken Jacobs**'s work: his refilming of found footage and his so-called "underground" films (initially made in the late 1950s and early 60s, in collaboration with Jack Smith). *Two Wrenching Departures* (2007) combines a slowed-down version of a five-minute document made by Jacobs in 1961 of a Smith performance called *The Whirled*, with material from an 1933 MGM romantic drama *The Barbarian*, set in Egypt and starring Ramon Navarro and Myrna Loy. Smith's antics with a group of performers parading in the streets of New York are extended into a ninety-minute exploration of possible motion effects. The work is a single-screen digital version of an earlier film from 1989 that utilizes a process Jacobs calls "Nervous System." This involves projecting two copies of a short film, slightly out of sync with each other, onto a single screen, using "analysis" projectors that can run at a variety of speeds below the standard twenty-four frames per second.

The films are shown at a very slow rate, with a propellor-like shutter rotating in front of each lens. This creates rapid shifts—fast wipes—between alternate frames, generating a range of extraordinary motion effects. These are mostly indescribable, but typical is one in which a figure and its background appear to pull in opposing directions. Although we are seeing the same frames repeatedly, there is a perception of constant zooming-in, but this effect is not common to everything in the frame. The movements are smooth and continuous-seeming, not step-like. Jacobs's process builds on earlier work by filmmakers such as Paul Sharits and Tony Conrad, the effects of whose flicker films are in fact generated inside the viewer's head. They do not exist as such on the film or even on the screen. Many of the processes Jacobs

Ken Jacobs, *Two Wrenching Departures* (2007). © Ken Jacobs

deploys and the phenomena they generate are well known to psychologists, but in a work like *Two Wrenching Departures* he has expanded and developed an exploratory aesthetic that goes far beyond the limited and instrumental examples used in psychology to demonstrate illusory motion effects.

JOHN PORTER, CANDID ARTS TRUST, 4 FEBRUARY 2007

A remarkable figure, **John Porter** is a prolific and highly active promoter and advocate of Super 8, which is often regarded as a fringe medium, even by filmmakers who are experimentalists working outside the gallery and cinema worlds. Porter has his own website, www.super8porter.ca, according to which he has made over three hundred films since 1968. The films are classified in self-defined genres; "Condensed Rituals," "Camera Dances," "Crowd Portraits," "Local Histories," "Toy Stories." He emphasizes the accessibility and playfulness of his work, and encourages his audience to talk and ask questions during screenings. Beneath this seemingly casual attitude, however, is a dedicated artist with a highly developed understanding of the medium, its limits, and how to control and transform time and space, light and color.

In *Down on Me* (1980–81), as the website commentary puts it, "John dances with, and is led by, the camera, which is running at one frame per second and turning its own way on the end of a fishing pole line while being raised and lowered from rooftops and bridges. Throughout, the camera is looking down at John on the ground, who's looking back up at the camera and turning with it." Porter rotates with the camera so that his position is fixed relative to it, while the ground and surrounding buildings spin relative to him. As well as time-lapse shooting—taking one frame per second instead of the usual twenty-four—he also deploys time-exposures later in the film, so that the exposure time for each frame is increased from around one thirtieth of a second to a whole second. This blurs the image, so that a rotating, vertiginous picture of deep space is whirled into a kaleidoscopic stream of circular colored motion. The image is dramatically flattened, condensing time into a solid multicolored spiral. Thus we are reminded that all film images are light events, "light moving in time" as William C. Wees has it in the title of his book on experimental film, and not, as narrative cinema would have it, objects depicted in space. We only seem to see things in that way because certain key coordinates present light to us in a certain, stabilized, or arrested manner. As soon as these coordinates are altered, as in Porter's films, the way we see light changes. A similar strategy is evident in *Amusement Park* (1978–79), a "Condensed Ritual." This film documents "different thrill rides at Toronto's historic, annual Canadian National Exhibition, all shot at night, at one frame per second, using one-second time exposures. Using two rolls of film shot in two consecutive years, the first roll consists of close-ups of each ride, edited in-camera. The second roll consists of a single, wide-angle long-shot of the entire 'Midway' of rides, seen from the top of the historic observation tower which has since been demolished. This scene was shot continuously over an

MUSEUMS, GALLERIES, AND OTHER VENUES (2)

www.frithstreetgallery.com
www.haunchofvenison.com
www.hauserwirth.com
www.lissongallery.com
Commercial galleries occasionally exhibit moving-image works for sale. For example, Bill Viola, perhaps the art world's most high-profile maker of moving-image works, is represented in the U.K. by the **Haunch of Venison** gallery, and Tacita Dean, whose moving-image works all take the form of 16mm film projections, shows regularly at the **Frith Street Gallery**. The fall 2007 Rodney Graham show at the **Lisson Gallery** included conceptual moving-image pieces.

www.bfi.org.uk/whatson/southbank/exhibitions
www.lux.org.uk
Among non-commercial film-specific venues, **BFI Southbank** (as the former National Film Theatre is now known) has built a dedicated gallery space for the screening of artists' film and video; it screened new work by Mark Lewis, 14 September–11 November 2007. A related program in the venue's main cinemas in September and October 2007 was a major retrospective of Andy Warhol's film work, curated by **Callie Angell** of the Whitney Museum of Modern Art, New York. The **Lux** hosts regular screenings and talks by visiting artists both at its east London premises and other venues chosen for the occasion. It has also developed publishing projects through both its website and books.

www.thehorsehospital.com
www.roxybarandscreen.com
There are also non-institutional venues: the **Roxy** combines a busy bar with a screening space; it has a fashionable (and often noisy) club atmosphere. Dedicated to "underground and avantgarde media" including film, **The Horse Hospital** is located centrally in Bloomsbury.

(This listing is extensive but not exhaustive.)

GRASSROOTS GROUPS

www.cogcollective.co.uk
On a monthly basis, the **Cog Collective** group run screenings at the Candid Arts Trust in Islington. Its key organizers—**Steven Ball**, **Sue K.**, and **Lynn Loo**—are all video-makers as well as researchers and writers.

www.nowhere-lab.org
The **no.w.here** group was set up by by two filmmakers, **Brad Butler** and **Karen Mirza**. They rescued the Lux's 16mm printing and processing equipment and installed it, along with cameras and editing facilities, in a studio space in west Hampstead. It runs courses in film production and offers filmmakers' residencies, both at its studio and, in a recent development, in Mumbai. The group hosts the **Light Reading** events, which have become an important opportunity to meet and question film- and video-makers. These events might be described as public salons: larger and slightly more formal than a private one, but more intimate and interactive than the usual Q&A sessions.

www.secretcinema.co.uk
The independent curator **Mark Webber** is the guiding hand behind the **Secret Cinema** listings service for screenings and events around the capital and the rest of the U.K. Webber programmed the Robert Beavers show at Tate Modern. He also devises a well-attended Avant-Garde Weekend at the London Film Festival each fall.

www.studycollection.co.uk
Based in the Central St Martins College of Art and Design, and founded by two original members of the LFMC, **Malcolm LeGrice** and **David Curtis**, the **British Artists' Film and Video Study Collection** is a major resource for historians. Curtis's recently published book, A *History of Artists' Film and Video in Britain, 1897–2004* (BFI Publishing, 2007), is a valuable and lavishly illustrated resource.

8 hour period beginning before dusk, increasing the time exposures as the daylight lessened and even after dark, ending in an almost white-out of the night scene created by two-minute exposures on each frame."

As the exposures get longer one's attention shifts steadily from what is represented to the transformations affected by the filming strategy. When the rides are static they appear as normal, but, increasingly with the longer exposures, they

John Porter, *Down on Me* (1980–81, top), *Amusement Park* (1978–79). © John Porter

are transformed into giant Catherine Wheels when they start up, and become whirling colored discs that appear to take off like flying saucers as they tilt on their axes. The amusement park is transformed into something like a scene from a 1950s sci-fi movie. Amusement parks come alive at night. They are in effect light shows, but a film like this emphasizes that the play of light on the rides is as important as it is in a purely light-centered event like a firework display. Light-play displaces human presence as the film increasingly compresses time and concentrates the light contained within each moment until the component color is returned to its source in white light. The film also turns on ideas of the natural and artificial. The amusement park's visitors are illuminated by daylight initially, but this gives way to electric light that finally returns to, is reconstituted as, white. Now the white of the projector bulb emerges, is made visible in its purity, so that we see the artificial source of everything we have been

watching up to this point: an electric lamp of a certain color-temperature shining through, and refracted by, a petroleum-derived transparent material.

What Ken Jacobs is to New York, Porter is to Toronto. These cities have been their respective homes for many years. Thus their films provide vivid documentary records both of urban avant-garde film scenes in their respective cities and of those cities in themselves, past and present. (In London, this role has occupied John Smith, with his many films made in the East End.)

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While the demise of the LFMC, both as an institution and as a unified venue, was the occasion for considerable regret and recrimination, the current situation has many different virtues. There is an exciting fluidity and energy. Venues range from the high Establishment of Tate Modern to ad hoc spaces (most dramatically Battersea Power Station), with a host of alternatives in between, from lofts and basements to alternative cinemas. Curating (or rather "programming," as it still modestly called in the non-gallery film and video world) has become widespread, and there are at least as many freelance, small-scale programmers—many of whom are themselves filmmakers—as there are full-time professionals.

Overall in the U.K., there is a continuing interest both in artisanal film (16mm and Super 8) and in conceptual video work (both homegrown and from abroad). The artisanal trend shows signs of augmentation and for anyone with an interest in the specific qualities of film as a medium for avant-garde work, that is a cause for celebration. To the extent that it is possible to generalize at all, the rest of Europe, by contrast, appears more interested in new-media work, including practices based around GPS, mobile phones, and the Internet. This is reflected in the programming at festivals such as Viper in Basel (www.viper.ch), Impact in Utrecht, and Ars Electronica in Linz (www.aec.at). Non-cinematic film and video is a wide and fascinating territory, as is evident from the diversity and vitality of the London scene.

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ABSTRACT This article surveys avant-garde moving-image work in London, 2006–07, ranging from 16mm films by young local artists, to video installations in Battersea Power Station by Chinese artists, to events at Tate Modern. The article also includes venue information and a listing of web resources.

KEYWORDS 16mm, avant-garde film, experimental film, video art, Super 8

Stanford ad
quarter page

Nebraska ad
quarter page

MINDFRAMES: MEDIA STUDY AT BUFFALO, 1973–1990

JOHN MINKOWSKY RECOUNTS AN INNOVATIVE EXHIBITION OF FILM, VIDEO, SOUND, AND DIGITAL ART INSTALLATIONS AND PROJECTIONS

Between 16 December 2006 and 25 March 2007, the MindFrames show at the Zentrum für Kunst und Medientechnologie (ZKM) in Karlsruhe, Germany showcased the careers of seven artists who taught at the Center for Media Study (CMS) at the State University of New York at Buffalo in the 1970s and 80s: James Blue, Tony Conrad, Hollis Frampton, Paul Sharits, Steina, Woody Vasulka, and Peter Weibel (the last three of whom served as curators of MindFrames; Weibel is now the Director of ZKM; there are further details available at hosting.zkm.de/mindframes_e/ and a full catalog is being prepared for publication by MIT Press). Also represented in the show was the prominent theorist Gerald O'Grady, who created the CMS and brought these founding figures of the so-called "structuralist" and "materialist" movements together. In his program notes, Peter Weibel likens the influence of the CMS to that of the Bauhaus or Black Mountain College, and this statement is not altogether far-fetched.

The exhibition was unprecedented, not only in conception and execution but also in the sheer scope and variety of materials it offered, and the diverse means by which the museumgoer could engage and interact with them. The show encompassed over 350 hours of work, much of it always accessible to the visitor (with some of it presented on schedules that changed daily). MindFrames raised many interesting questions about latent possibilities of media exhibition in the context of the museum and the roles that moving-image curators might play in the new technological architecture of our evolving information environment. It provides a model for future work.

Steina and Woody Vasulka were the initiators of MindFrames. They started out with three assumptions. First: an all-digital show (with film and video works transferred as necessary). Second: a show that could be controlled from a distant location. Third: a show capable of being simultaneously disseminated worldwide. (The technological aspects are discussed below.) Major additional expertise was required to implement these ideas. It was provided by Robert O'Kane, who provided a capacious server and database and a particular encoding system similar to the one utilized in the manufacture of DVDs. MindFrames may have been principally a film and video show, but its execution was almost entirely achieved through the use of computers.

In terms of organization, the Medienmuseum at ZKM was configured into three concentric circuits or rings. Although the functions of the outer and central rings overlapped significantly, that of the inner ring, designed especially for MindFrames, was completely distinct and undeniably the most innovative attraction of the show. The Medienmuseum is a large space, roughly 40,000 square feet and sixty feet high, the perimeter of which, on this occasion, consisted of twenty-one rooms or "sequestered" regions of varying dimensions housing installation works, dedicated and thematically grouped screening rooms with dynamic schedules (i.e., changing daily), and a large gallery for photographic and other static works. This was the outer ring that circumscribed the whole exhibition.

THE OUTER RING

Four of the galleries or viewing spaces presented more than one artist. There was a Film Room and a separate Video Room, distinguished by the medium in which the included works originated; there was also a Document Room where rare interviews with all of the makers were shown; and a Music Room presenting video and sound works informed by the musical backgrounds of Steina, Tony Conrad, and Peter Weibel. Outside each of these rooms was a luminous plasma-screen display of the precise schedule—by hour and minute—of what was then on screen, as well as a listing of what would be shown over the remainder of the day. The greatest quantity and range of material were presented in the four rooms.

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The central exhibition space.

Photo © Barbara von Woellwarth. Courtesy of ZKM

The other galleries were allotted to individual artists, with one exception: the largest of them displayed the photographic and related static visual work of Tony Conrad, Hollis Frampton, and Peter Weibel. Conrad was represented by Polaroid and poster-sized photographs and a larger *Plato Corner Works* (1976–77), varied configurations of adherent triangular edgepieces by which pictures have traditionally been mounted in photo albums. In the same gallery were five series of black-and-white photographs by Frampton, including *Word Pictures* (1962–63), *The* nostalgia *Portfolio* (1971), and *Sixteen Studies from Vegetable Locomotion* (1975), these three intimately related to his cinematic endeavors. *Word Pictures*, a series of documentary photos each beginning with a different letter of the alphabet, has direct bearing on *Zorns Lemma* (1970), and *The* nostalgia *Portfolio* is made up of the images and texts used in the film *nostalgia* (1971). *Sixteen Studies from Vegetable Locomotion*, made with Marion Faller, spoof the proto-cinematic works of Eadweard Muybridge. Six photographic and collage works by Peter Weibel were also presented in this space. However conventional this gallery appeared in relation to the rest of the show, it was a potent reminder that all of the artists in MindFrames had worked in a variety of media.

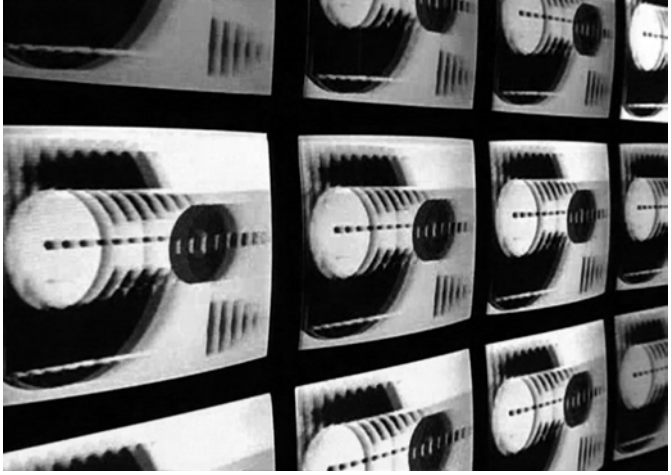
Of the remaining fourteen separate surrounding galleries, there were two screening spaces for Blue's 16mm and Super 8 film and video documentaries about international crises of famine and disease, and the housing problems of the underclasses in Houston, Texas; one for Conrad's productions for a weekly cable program, *Studio of the Streets* (1991–93), impromptu interviews with passers-by around Buffalo's City Hall on various civic issues; one each for a continuous screening of Frampton's *Zorns Lemma* and *nostalgia*; and one for Woody Vasulka's *Studies for Scan Processor* (1974–77), a series of short video experiments using a specialized form of analog synthesizer that he shot directly onto film. Sharits's two-screen work, *Razor Blades* (1965—digitally reconfigured) shared a room with his film *Apparent Motion* (1975) which was screened in its original 16mm format twice daily. Seven other galleries were given over to installation works, along with seven in the central ring.

THE INSTALLATIONS AND THE CENTRAL RING

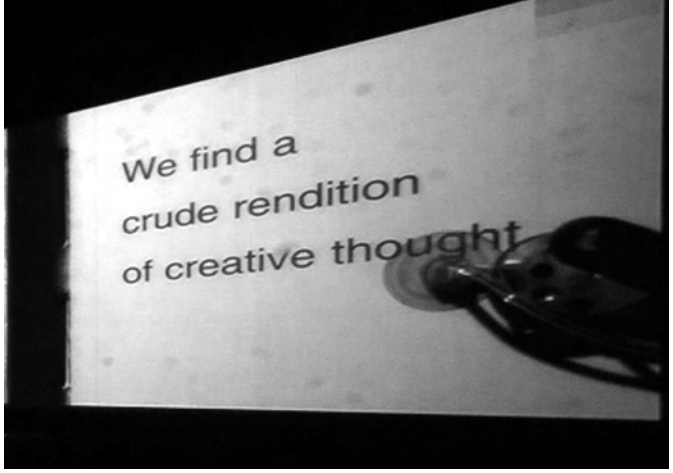
Suspended above the central ring and viewed from a tiered space on a balcony, a Grand View—an extraction of the essence and preview of MindFrames—occupied a presiding position. On a panorama of three massive adjacent screens, excerpts from various works in diverse configurations introduced the viewer to materials displayed in different contexts in the exhibition. They were usually filled with footage from a single multiple-screen work or special edits devised especially for the Grand View.

Steina and Woody Vasulka

The two most prominent works in the central ring were both by Steina. *Allvision* was a new realization of a site-specific piece she has been refashioning over three decades, the recurrent feature a mirrored ball around which pivots a mechanical armature with a video camera mounted at each end, and with closed-circuit monitors displaying these camera images just beyond. At all times, the cameras, by means of the reflective sphere, capture the entire 360-degree surround (hence the title). In the past, Steina has sometimes left the circumambient space unaltered, but here she supplemented the piece with two large graphics of elliptical spheroids suggesting planetary forms.



The Vasulkas, *Matrix I* (c. 1970–72). Courtesy of ZKM

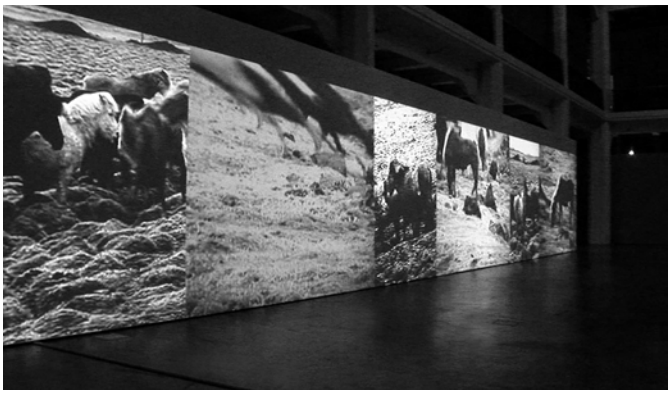


Woody Vasulka, *Scribe* (1998), detail. Courtesy of ZKM

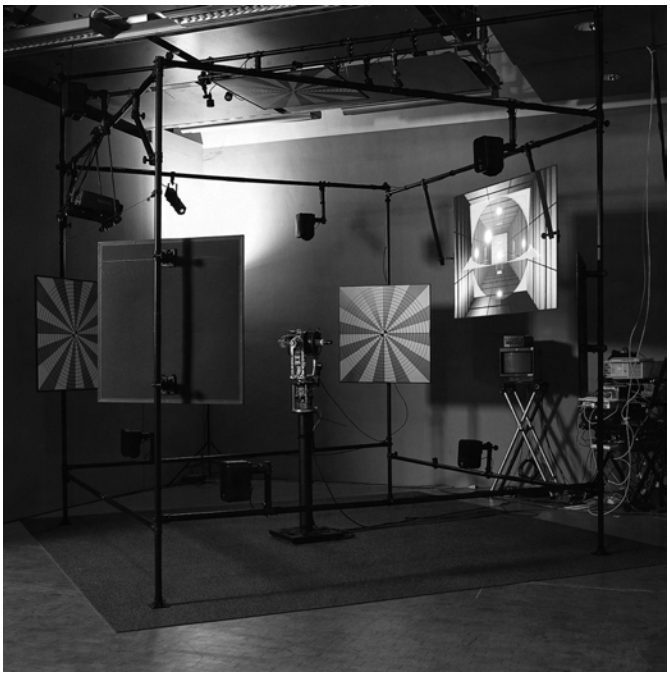
The more recent *Mynd* (2000) is a splendid six-channel projection displayed on six contiguous vertically oriented panels of a large screen about fifty feet wide by twelve feet high. There are four distinct sections to the overall work, each defined by a different aspect of the natural environment of her homeland (including the sea and pastures with horses). The images in each section are closely interrelated, varying in rhythm and direction, and their delicate rendering is almost painterly, droplets of water in slow motion suggestive of finely executed brushstrokes.

There were also two collaborations by Steina and Woody Vasulka, *Matrix I* and *Matrix II* (both c. 1970–72). Both were presented on stacks of twelve monitors, four wide by three high, displaying related material on loops of horizontally drifting discs (a technique they innovated at this time).

Woody Vasulka's two complex electro-optical installations were staged in "sequestered" spaces, part of the central ring and yet at its far corners. They are *Scribe* and *The Theater of Hybrid Automata*, from a set of six works collectively entitled *The Brotherhood* first realized in its entirety at the NTT InterCommunication Center in Tokyo in 1998. Both are elaborate kinetic systems of electronic observation built from combinations of cast-off military apparatuses, specially designed mechanical and pneumatic devices, live surveillance cameras, and computer synthesis tools, all of them intercommunicating. Dynamic sculptures that rearticulate the spaces



Steina, *Mynd* (2000). Photo © Peer Bode



Woody Vasulka, *Theater of Hybrid Automation* (1998). Photo © Barbara von Woellwarth. Courtesy of ZKM

Steina, *Allvision* (2006). Photo © Barbara von Woellwarth. Courtesy of ZKM

they inhabit, they are, by turns, predictable, ambiguous, and indeterminate.

The more accessible of the two Tables (as Vasulka calls them) was *Scribe*, which addresses printed language as notation and its electronic transcodification. It is an intricate automatic electromechanical copy-device of sorts—a scrivener of the post-technological age—by which printed text on paper is read by machine. A book, laid flat and open to a page bearing a brief and cryptic statement, is observed by a video camera mounted overhead, and text-recognition software empowers a light-plotting table to write out each word in sequence. The viewer can watch the actual luminous tracing of the letters on this horizontal bench, see it projected on the rear wall of the space, and hear a toneless computer-generated voice recite the message. The most dramatic component in *Scribe*, however, is a specially designed hydraulic arm that turns the pages of the book by means of a suction cup-like device. When each page of plotted text has evaporated from the screen, this robotic arm leaps to life, springs forward in a flash of light, engages the page and flips it over; the effect is startling as this strange mechanical contraption is counterpoised against a panoply of electronic devices.

The other work, *The Theater of Hybrid Automata*, is even more elaborate, and makes direct use of a military artifact—a motorized gyroscope—centered in a cubic space, upon which is mounted a video camera that pivots 360 degrees on the horizontal and vertical axes, pausing intermittently to map its own orientation in space by means of graphic targets. When the halted camera has identified the direction in which it is pointed, the camera resumes its programmed movements. A large video-projection screen hung on the far wall systematically displays combinations of the camera images with computer-generated objects to create new relationships between "actual" and "virtual" space, or, at other times, purely synthetic models of the construction and its architectural environs.

Peter Weibel

The simplest of Peter Weibel's installations is the droll *Possible* (1969), a conundrum in which the word of the title is discovered to be painted on the screen rather than projected by an empty film projector, which merely serves as a source of illumination.

Weibel's video-projection work, *Way Way Out* (1968/2006 reconstruction), extends over the floor, wall, and ceiling, with one of three video projectors trained on each surface. The viewer may enter this environment, looking down, up, and straight ahead at contrapuntal images of nature, urban scenes, and other materials in relationships that often confound or subvert expectations.

Peter Weibel, *Way Way Out* (1968/2006). Courtesy of ZKM

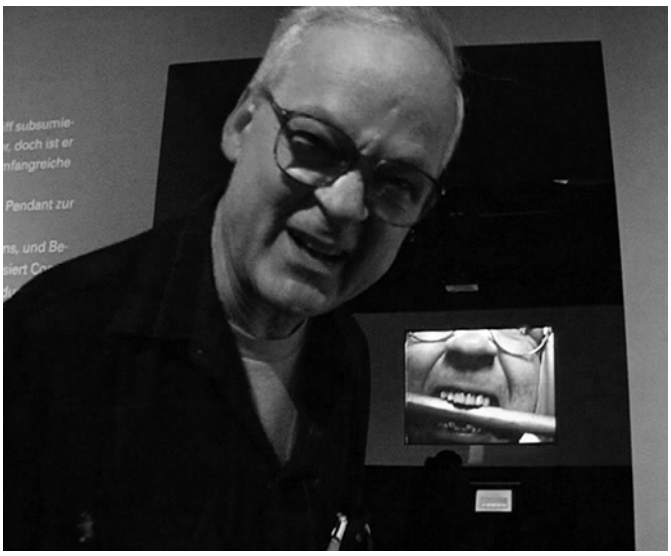
Weibel's two other installations share a common theme. The interactive *Kruzifikation der Identitat* (1973) is a critique of mediated observation. As the viewer stands on a platform, his or her haloed shadow is reflected on a life-sized cross with a small, unilluminated video screen embedded at the center. When one extends one's arms into a cruciform position, two sensors at the ends of the crossbar trigger a small lens located in the headpiece, and a live video image of the viewer's torso is displayed in that same monitor. One's image is caught and transfixed simultaneously by the television camera.

The aura of light that surrounded the participant in *Kruzifikation* was further intensified by a miasmic leakage from the adjoining room in which was another work about martyrdom, this time in a somber, elegiac tone. From the far corner of the space, slides of concentration-camp victims were projected onto a screen of steam about six inches deep by six feet wide. These compelling and appalling apparitions were given an illusory depth when viewed through the dense, swirling haze, like dark phantoms emerging from the residue of a pyre. This testament to the horrors of one of history's greatest atrocities was poignantly entitled *Dumb-Show* (1969/2006 reconstruction), and was both a powerful testament to the victims of the Holocaust and a provocation to question the appropriation of such inflammatory material into art.

Tony Conrad, Paul Sharits

The outer ring of galleries also housed four other installation works initially made on film. One room belonged to Tony Conrad's *Articulation of Boolean Algebra for Film Opticals*, a seven-minute looped excerpt from a 1975 film shown on a mounted 16mm projector. Trained in mathematics, Conrad employed an abstract algebraic formula for logical operations to structure the most rigorous of his "flicker" films. Visually sophisticated, the film is more dependent upon its conceptual framework than the viewer's perceptual discernment of the organizational shape itself, which is as impenetrable to the eye as the mathematical ideas it is based on are to the non-specialist mind. Less immediate in impact than a work

Paul Sharits, *Third Degree* (1982). Photo © Peer Bode



Tony Conrad in front of the Media Lab, *In Line* (1986) on screen. Courtesy of ZKM

like Conrad's earlier and essential film, *The Flicker* (1965), *Articulation* was one of the most resolutely "structural" works in the exhibition.

Paul Sharits had been allotted three installations: the two-screen *Razor Blades* and *Epileptic Seizure Comparison* and his spectacular triptych for film, *Third Degree*.

Razor Blades (1965) was Sharits's first multi-screen effort and was not conceived as an installation, but rather as an unconventional twenty-five-minute moviegoing experience; here it became more the object of casual observation than one for serious contemplation.

Epileptic Seizure Comparison, a 1976 work designed as a double-screen installation—or "locational film piece," as Sharits termed it—directly addresses the fact that the photic stimulation of flicker films can alter brainwave patterns in a small number of viewers, actually inducing epileptic convulsions. Sharits's intention was to simulate, via sound and light, the experience of a convulsive seizure under artificial conditions, an altered state of consciousness that is not, according to his research, without its ecstatic transports or aesthetic ramifications. Images of patients in the throes of *grand mal* seizures are among the visuals.

Many of Sharits's works, for all their formal, abstract beauty in the revelation of film's material attributes, are infused with elements of violence. In *Third Degree* (1982), this destructive impulse is directed at the substance of the celluloid strip itself. Presented on freestanding, optically altered film projectors with synchronized continuous image and sound loops, it displays three images of different dimensions. Color frames burnt and melted by intense heat, and the image of a woman's face before which a lit match is held, as though she were undergoing a vicious interrogation, radiate from the screen. By rephotographing successively from the smallest to largest screen, this last metaphorically presents third-degree burns, even as the woman, suggestively being threatened by the flame, is also undergoing the "third degree." An ominous intermittent soundtrack combines the noise of rattlesnakes and human utterances of resistance to torture. *Third Degree* is radical deconstruction through immolation, disclosing the frangibility of film in a flare of terrible beauty.

MEDIA LABS IN THE INNER RING

Moving inward from the central ring, the viewer came upon a group of eight specially designed Media Labs, one for each creator. These were like electronic study carrels with specialized collections whereby the work of each individual maker could be explored in depth and at length. Middlemost in each was a Video Jukebox, a console with a touch screen from which the visitor could select from more than a dozen complete films or tapes or from archival interviews with the artists, and view them, in full or part, on a nine-by-six-foot screen. To the immediate left as one entered a lab was a mounted computer database that permitted access to a much larger selection of films and tapes as well as a complete bibliography and film/videography, an extensive collection of the artist's writings, and a variety of photographic documents.

Along the right hand walls of five of the labs were interactive stations where one could simulate the creative practices or analyze excerpts of the work of each artist. For Paul Sharits, the participant was able to emulate the process of creating a flicker film by filling in linear fashion a matrix representing a sequence of frames with either a solid color or symbol, and play them back in sequence, at variable speeds selected by the participant, on a second monitor. It was an elegant, illuminating, and easy-to-use instrument, as was Steina's, where pressing any number on a keypad activated a unique digital transformation of one of several pre-taped sequences in ways similar to those she employs in her works.

Vasulka's and Frampton's stations, by contrast, were designed for the analysis of sequences of specific tapes or films, and were more difficult to use. Particularly resistant was

Creating a flicker film at the Sharits work station.

Photo © Barbara von Woellwarth. Courtesy of ZKM

Frampton's, where, in one monitor, the viewer could manipulate a cube, each side offering a portion of a different film, and select particular sequences of frames for replay on a second screen at a variable speed. Compared to the other lab stations, this was the least user-friendly. Vasulka's was more readily comprehended and controlled, allowing one to alter the transparency and number of overlapping video frames, but was rather frustrating as a learning tool. Both could have benefited from design modification, but the attempts were commendable.

Finally there was a selection of work by Gerald O'Grady, who over the past thirty years has produced dozens of tabloid catalogues for CMS. His jukebox featured half-hour public television programs entitled *Film-Makers*, in which he interviewed thirteen independent makers showing and discussing their work.

DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY

As mentioned, it had been Steina's and Vasulka's intention from the outset that the exhibition be presented entirely in digital format. The digital format is unlike film or videotape, in that it has no material base. Digital code is binary data, pure and simple, that can represent all manner of information, including moving images and sound, with an extremely high degree of fidelity and clarity. Digital video has increasingly become the standard for television and Internet transmission and storage on DVDs, as well in as film production. For MindFrames, both film and analog video had to be reformatted, or compressed and encoded, into digital data, while attempting to minimize any loss of quality or essential component features of either medium.

There are several advantages to transferring film images and video signals into digital formats. One is general: unlike film and videotape, both subject to deterioration over time and repeated use, digital information is, essentially, immaterial, that is, pure data which can be stored in a variety of ways, and therefore not subject to corporeal corruptibility. Another is more specific, in this case, to the needs of MindFrames: given the vast amount of material included in the exhibition (more than two weeks of round-the-clock viewing!) and the desire to have it accessible in the most flexible manner possible, a capacious server for the digital database was the most pragmatic solution.

Vasulka enlisted Robert O'Kane, who is based in Cologne as UNIX Administrator at the Academy of Media Arts, to design a technical system—the selection and configuring of necessary server and other instrumentation, and the oversight of the management of the database—whereby this vast quantity of moving image/sound material could be catalogued, accessed, and distributed for exhibition in multiple ways.

O'Kane, aside from being a knowledgeable and creative designer of computer systems, was, as a former student at CMS, also familiar with the *oeuvre* of each of the artists, and the particular aesthetic and theoretical issues with which they had grappled. As one example, the nature of the film and video frame as the basic unit through which the image is conveyed was of particular concern for Paul Sharits and Woody Vasulka. Both sought to employ the frame to different ends—in the case of Sharits, to explore the formal nature and perceptual effects of the rapid fluctuation or flicker of color fields; and for Vasulka, as a means of investigating the manner in which an electronic signal was registered so that it could be controlled or processed. As it was essential in the digital compression of film and video images to preserve the reproduction of actual frames, O'Kane selected MPEG2, a prevalent standard for broadcast, cable, and DVDs, but one that is rapidly being superseded by video-streaming on the web as the more common manner of Internet transmission. Streaming, however, fails to maintain the convention of the frame.

The server for all of the moving-image materials was located at Karlsruhe, and then managed from the database in Cologne, with O'Kane at the helm, maintaining an uninterrupted flow of information from one site to the other. Cologne was the location of "control central" because it is O'Kane's base of operations but, in pure theory (even if it not as yet practicable), the server could be maintained from anywhere in the world (even Buffalo).

All of the material had, of course, to be transferred to digital at the outset. This presented no problem to the video artists as both video and digital are electronically based. There was, however, a debate between film "purists" and the organizers of MindFrames, the former feeling that the integrity of their medium would be compromised by such a translation. There was little evidence that the films in MindFrames suffered by their digital presentation. But that debate explained

the presence of Sharits's *Third Degree* as a film installation proper, a resolution that may have compromised Vasulka's notion of total digitality. However, the presence of the film apparatus was a reminder of the brute and beautiful mechanical basis for cinema, its projectors inelegant instruments emitting their sprocketfuls of clatter and other quirks.

But overall, this digital representation and long-distance transmission of film and video in a museum context was a forward-thinking technological breakthrough, pointing the way toward global simultaneous collaboration in the exhibition of the media arts. Vasulka's and Steina's commitment to constantly casting off into uncharted streams of electronic flow, exemplified in MindFrames, is unparalleled.

THOUGHTS ON THE FUTURE OF MEDIA EXHIBITION

From my own experience as a curator/programmer of electronic art, a group show usually evolves around a specific topic as the basis on which individual works are assembled. In the case of MindFrames, the organizing principle was uncommon (although by no means unprecedented), determined by the fortuitous confluence of artists, all with very different but overlapping aesthetic concerns, in a particular place and time. The work of these eight creators, therefore, did not need to be thematically pigeonholed. Each choice could be based solely on its excellence and representative nature.

Of course, the selection of installations in MindFrames represented a mere fraction of such pieces by the artists who worked in that form. A much larger representation of their collective materials existed in the galleries, and as one penetrated to an even broader sampling in the inner labs, the entire exhibition seemed to expand to something more like eight simultaneous retrospectives than a typical group show.

The exhibition, then, tended toward the inclusive, and although none of the artists was actually given a full retrospective of their works in projected form, there was no reason that, technologically speaking, they could not have been. O'Kane stated that he could easily have accommodated far more material in the show as it stood, and a larger database could have been mounted and maintained. He noted that, next time, he would begin with a sixteen-terabyte capacity, roughly thirty times the size of the memory that was used for MindFrames.

Although the Video Jukeboxes in the labs offered a limited selection, a portion of the process that might loosely be designated as "curatorial," concerning what to watch, how much of it, and in what order, had been relegated to the individual viewer, and this had been supplemented by the adjacent databases, which offered an even wider choice. Moreover, the centrality of the enlightening interview materials, which constituted a significant portion of the jukebox selection and the exhibition in general, might otherwise have been assigned a subsidiary role, if not totally excluded, from a show of this nature. It offered a depth and currency, as well as context, impossible to achieve by other means.

Perhaps nothing redefined the content of museum media exhibition so much as these labs themselves, any one of which would have required several days to fully plumb. A jukebox easily contained at least a full day's worth of concentrated viewing. The writings by the artists made available on the database, generally theoretical and sometimes dense, difficult reading because so rich in new aesthetic concepts, were a rare resource. Although most had been previously published, they are not, with a few exceptions, available in single collections, and then only partially. These essays allow greater insight into what are sometimes esoteric bodies of work. And the simulation/analysis tables had the playful interactivity more often linked to science museums in their educative capacities, as well as the scholarly pursuit through close, frame-by-frame examination that is associated with academic film/video study programs.

Like Vasulka's automata, this was a hybrid, if not mongrel, show, serving well a number of constituencies. From the first encounter, MindFrames was intoxicating; a majestic barrage of dazzling stroboscopic energy rendered large. Later, in the relative sanctums of more personal spaces, the plethora of possibilities was intellectually charged and challenging. The installations were expertly displayed, and the quality of film/video in digital form of the highest order. The exhibition was dense, yet never had any sense of clutter about it, and each piece was provided more than adequate segregation to permit uninterrupted contemplation. The fault of the show is that it may have been too much of a good thing. Viewers may have been sated, gasping for breath, and at the same time frustrated at not being able to take it all in. After six days there, I still felt that I had only scratched the surface. That MindFrames existed beyond the constraints of the museum itself was a large measure of its significance. The exhibition was itself a work of art, in concept, design, and execution, a curatorial triumph that was appreciated by a wide range of visitors, from the curious initiate to the insatiable savant.

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ABSTRACT An examination of a German exhibition that presented, in an innovative digital format, 350 hours of film and video work and fourteen installations by eight artists, as well as specially designed Media Labs, which included Video Jukeboxes, databases, and work stations simulating these artists' creative and analytical processes.

KEYWORDS experimental, video art, installation, analog-to-digital, media exhibitions

PLAYING UNDEAD

"Survival horror" is a highly popular genre of video games that takes its cue from horror cinema but modifies the experience, exploiting both fear and the urge to fight back. The term itself originated with the game *Resident Evil* (1996). Inspired in part by George A. Romero's *Living Dead* series of films, the loading screen of *Resident Evil* invited players to "[e]nter the world of survival horror," where destroying or eluding bloodthirsty zombies is the order of the day. Hugely successful, the *Resident Evil* franchise now encompasses not only three sequels and several spin-offs, but also a trio of feature films (most recently the 2007 *Resident Evil: Extinction*) that have a game-like structure: the heroine advances from battle to battle against increasingly formidable opponents.

As the video-game genre most tightly linked to a cinematic tradition, survival horror upsets some of the assumed differences between cinema and games. At its most basic, the difference is that cinema spectators just watch (or cower), while gamers actively manipulate the action. As the "survival" tag suggests, an aggressive agency is involved in these games: the emphasis is not on the traumatizing dimensions of fear and violence, but on the hero's perseverance—and sheer brutality—in the face of relentless enemies and seemingly overwhelming odds. Survival horror draws on the reflex-activating power of fear rather than paralyzed gawking. It is a feature of these games that the protagonists are typically not brawny commandos, but rather ordinary people, often women, armed with scavenged weapons such as knives, lead pipes, and pistols that have only limited ammunition. The games involve endurance and cunning as much as military-style marksmanship or physical strength. Although they are graphically violent, rewarding players with gory sequences in which knives slash through zombie flesh or shotguns explode zombie heads, survival-horror games also frequently require players to run or hide, avoiding combat, in order to make it to the next level.

Horror spectators in cinemas will sometimes impotently call out warnings ("Don't open the door!") to on-screen protagonists. In survival-horror games the urge to intervene, to take control, is enabled: the player can alter the outcome of the grisly screen scenario. In order to do so, however, gamers are obliged to actively investigate the most frightening areas of the game. Unlike many popular video games (such as the *Grand Theft Auto* and *Halo* series) that afford 360-degree views of vast, exquisitely textured landscapes that are open for free-roaming exploration, survival-horror games typically confine players in dark, claustrophobic interiors. Furthermore, the framing of these environments, as in horror cinema, is often restricted. Off-screen space becomes an out-of-reach source of dread and danger. Curiosity and investigation, which are so often deadly in the plots of horror films, are essential in these games.

First-person shooters in which looking is the same as targeting and simulation games that allow a God's-eye view render visible space rational, continuous, and fully actionable. But in survival-horror games such as the *Fatal Frame* series (2001, 2003, 2005) and *Eternal Darkness: Sanity's Requiem* (2002), looking is uncertain, partial, always involving a measure of powerlessness. The game environment is from the start feebly lit and mist-shrouded; and visibility is further circumscribed by the fact that as the player moves, the game viewpoint switches without warning from one fixed and limited vantage point to another. There is no way to fully survey the environment. Players must infer what is missing from a series of third-person shots, stitching together a more

Camera as weapon in *Fatal Frame 3: The Tormented.*

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Gory spectacle in *Resident Evil 4*.

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First-person targeting in *Resident Evil: The Umbrella Chronicles*. © 2007 Capcom Entertainment Inc.

comprehensive view. So, rather than gliding into a room toward a cabinet in the corner in a single continuous shot, you first see the doorway to the room from an exterior perspective, then cut to a long shot of one side of the room's interior as you enter, and then cut to another, medium shot of the cabinet as you approach it—a version of cinema-style montage that can be awkward and jarring in a video game. Although the player directs the character's movement through the labyrinthine space, the game determines each (restricted) view of the scene. Therefore you may not be allowed to see the zombie crouched in a blind spot in the room's far corner. As in horror cinema, a sense of paranoia unsettles every step forward. Navigating through the game becomes a highly anxious experience; the gameplay is hesitant rather than fluid and assertive.

In *Fatal Frame* vision is fearful not commanding. This is especially so because, rather than any weapon, the game's young female protagonist carries only an ancient camera (called a "Camera Obscura") that exorcizes attacking ghosts by capturing them on film. The tighter you frame your target, the more effective your counter-attack, but the more blind you are to your immediate surroundings. Ghosts slip in and out of your camera's viewfinder to reappear directly beside you but beyond the camera's range of vision. Although getting a close-up of a hideously deformed wraith just as its pale arms reach for your neck will enable you to destroy it, it also makes for a harrowing face-to-face encounter. Unlike in a horror film, you cannot simply cover your eyes. *Eternal Darkness* goes even further in impairing the player's ability to master the game environment. At one point in the game, just as zombies begin to swarm around your character's avatar, the game disables all controller commands and flashes a simulated-but-very-convincing error message that the game controller has been disconnected. You fiddle with the console cables in a panic, watching helplessly while your debilitated character is pounced on and killed. With this fourth-wall-breaking trick, *Eternal Darkness* brings gaming closer to the cinema spectator's powerless horror at on-screen carnage.

Although it is abundant in other video-game genres, the first-person perspective is not found much in survival horror. In addition to providing an expansive and empowering form of vision that is antithetical to the surrender of visibility and control central to the horror experience, the frequent use of a subjective camera to represent a killer's viewpoint in cinematic horror is not possible in survival-horror games (although one could imagine a game where the protagonist is a homicidal zombie, it would be hard to square this with the key element of an ordinary protagonist in peril). However, the recent spin-off game for the Nintendo Wii, *Resident Evil: Umbrella Chronicles* (2007), is a first-person shooter that transforms the Wii remote into a gun that you use to target on-screen monsters. The unbroken fluidity of the first-person camera combined with the accuracy of the Wii remote's aim offer the player an unprecedented ease and efficiency of movement. Yet this more responsive and intuitive new controller design comes at a price. There is much less disorientation and terror. We are no longer entirely in the world of survival horror where our bodily cues for distress and pleasure are scrambled, and where the circuit between vision, intention, and action is always at risk of being broken.

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A GUARANTEED PREMONITION

The game began in July with a trailer (YouTube: "Cloverfield Trailer Monstrous 1-18-08"). Set at a farewell party for Rob, a young New Yorker moving to Japan, and shot on handheld DV as if by one of the guests, the scene's joviality is interrupted by a loud, low roar followed by a tremor and temporary blackout. Guests head to the roof in time to see a huge fireball erupt downtown. They flee downstairs, the camera shaking and cutting out, into a chaotic street scene. "I saw it!" a man yells. "It's alive! It's huge!" An airborne object careers off a nearby building and barrels down the street. It is the head of the Statue of Liberty. Then come the taglines: "From producer J.J. Abrams," "In theaters 1-18-08."

It's established teaser-trailer practice not to show the monster; to withhold even a title is bolder. But Abrams is a past master at keeping audiences guessing, notably as the creator of *Lost*, a TV series whose unprecedented appeal to puzzle-mindedness has provoked more fascination and frustration than any show since *Twin Peaks* (1990–91). This appeal was further exploited in 2006's *The Lost Experience*, a large-scale "alternate-reality game" (ARG) that invited participants deeper into *Lost*'s secrets through clues left on websites, phone lines, advertisements, and even a published novel. There are some precedents for this radical kind of marketing: fictitious online contextual "furniture" was used to promote *The Blair Witch Project* (1999) and the ARG proper was inaugurated with *The Beast*, a murder-mystery Internet game that accompanied *AI Artificial Intelligence* (2001). The Abrams project, however, is a newly complex sort of hype.

Abrams's involvement was sufficient cause for a clutch of websites to spring up, such as cloverfieldclues.blogspot.com, full of speculation. The earliest rumors concerned the movie's name. It was initially widely referred to as "Cloverfield" but another half-dozen possible titles have surfaced, from "Monstrous" to "Chocolate." Then there was the content. Was the film a new *Godzilla*? An H. P. Lovecraft adaptation? A *Lost* spin-off? (Abrams hinted at September's San Diego Comic-Con that it was a completely original project, but otherwise kept schtum.) It was also claimed that the film takes the form of an ersatz relic, the contents of a camcorder.

In the absence of official information, curious minds worked with what they had. It was discovered that www.1-18-08.com brought up a site showing a close-up snapshot of two women looking up in fear. Time-stamped "01/18/08 12:36A," it suggested that the movie's action will be set on its release date. Over the coming weeks, other snapshots were added to the site, showing scenes from both the party and the military mobilization following the explosion. The images could be dragged and rotated but did not seem to offer much material information, until it was realized that some could be flipped over to reveal handwritten notes. This in turn brought the discovery of MySpace pages for Rob (www.myspace.com/robbyhawkins) and six of his friends. Regularly updated with details of their lives in New York (Rob plays XBox and is interested in working in marketing), they offered little obvious information about the movie.

Meanwhile, an image on a T-shirt in the trailer led to slusho.jp, ostensibly the website of a Japanese frozen drink brand. It too seemed irrelevant to the trailer. Experienced ARGers, however, knew that germane details would be lurking somewhere. Could there be a clue in Slusho!'s strange slogan, "You can't drink just six"? Or its corporate history, which mentions the disappearance of the company's founder while "on a sea adventure to find the greatest, most tastiest ingredient [in] the world"—an ingredient eventually discovered "on the deep ocean floor, under amazing pressure and in the most extreme cold," by her son, Ganu Yoshida, a marine scientist?

At the end of July, a teaser poster was unveiled. It showed a beheaded Statue of Liberty with deep claw marks and a wake leading across the Hudson River to devastated lower Manhattan buildings. A frustrating lull followed until, in early September, users of the ARG forum unfiction (forums.unfiction.

The home page for www.slusho.jp

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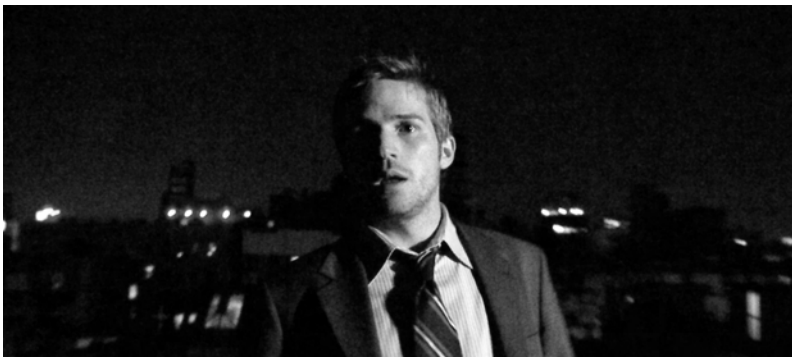

The "Cloverfield" trailer. © 2007 Paramount Pictures

com/forums) found a site, www.jamieandteddy.com, apparently set up by Jamie Lascano, one of Rob's MySpace friends. The site hosts a video in which Jamie lovingly addresses her overseas boyfriend Teddy and mentions a bladder infection, a baffling but undoubtedly deliberate detail.

At the end of September (this column was filed on 5 October), a new image on 1-18-08.com led indirectly to another faux corporate site. Tagruato.jp is the homepage of the deep-sea drilling company headed by Ganu Yoshida. Tagruato's ocean-floor explorations have, we learn, yielded organisms which seem to give Slusho! addictive, energizing, euphoric qualities. The firm is also looking for young American marketing executives ahead of the drink's international launch, and has plans for ocean-floor drilling "in areas previously unexplored by man," including off the east coast of the U.S.

Dots appear, then, but they must be joined by hand. To play the game is to be industrious and prepared for disappointment. For every Google search that yields a fresh piece of the puzzle, there will be a dozen goose chases involving fruitless audio-track analysis or misappropriation of "out-of-game" (OOG) sites. For weeks, ethanhaaswasright.com, a site about prophecies of metropolitan destruction, was widely presumed to be connected to the trailer; it turned out to be part of a different ARG promoting a video game. Another website, www.abz3293.com, whose name refers to a license plate visible in the trailer, was obliged to disavow any official connection to the project. A striking, detailed design of a whale-like creature was pounced on as leaked production art; in fact it was an accomplished entry in an online design-your-own-"Cloverfield"-monster competition (dougblot.blogspot.com). Nor have fans been slow to imitate and spoof the trailer (see "1-18-08 Field Reporter Teaser Trailer" and "Cloverfield - 1-18-08 - Spoof - Monstrous - Overnight -" on YouTube).

The fascination of the 1-18-08 ARG surely lies in its deft insinuation of a movie world into the "real" pages of the Internet. Just as the movie itself promises to be salvaged camcorder footage, so the ARG is effective because it repeatedly achieves an illusion of authenticity. Players are invited to treat fantasy as if it were reality in three tenses. Uncovering the backstory of the crisis demands the kind of conspiracy investigation for which the web caters so well (indeed, the 9/11 parallels are hard to overlook, from the lower Manhattan fireball and dust cloud to the hysterical online identification of "devil faces" within them). Some zealous believers have anointed themselves citizen journalists: the host of one fan site begins his podcasts with "Hello, welcome to 1-18-08news.com. This is Brad Johnson recording." The key distinction, of course, is that here there is no doubting the existence of a conspiracy.

To keep up with the present-tense development of the project, players must engage in a kind of online eavesdropping, tracking the lives of the characters via the MySpace blogs, webcam videos, and photo uploads that for many of us are part of a daily engagement with the socialized web. Players must also keep tabs on the dealings of the corporations that seemingly play some part in unleashing the monster. It is a soap opera on one hand, an industrial scandal on the other. Both make for compulsive surfing. Meanwhile, the 1-18-08 deadline constitutes a ticking clock that demands an eye on the future, the trailer acting as a kind of guaranteed premonition against which current developments can be charted.

Unprecedented in its breadth and sophistication, the campaign provides a new model for cultivating narrative and emotional engagement in an unreleased feature while leaving its actual contents under wraps. Such a head-start of imaginative investment is normally available only to spin-off projects; in this sense, the movie becomes a spin-off of its own publicity. When seasoned players of the game enter the theater on 18 January 2008, they will in many respects be more deeply embedded in the story than the characters on the screen.

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STOCKING UP ON OLD BONES

Amid the general euphoria of film collectors and connoisseurs over the advent of DVD, at least one voice has raised a niggling doubt. It belongs to the critic and filmmaker (also ex-*Cahiers du Cinéma* editor) Thierry Jousse, in his provocative column for the French magazine *Panic*. In a think-piece titled "A Fish in the Aquarium" (translated into English online at www.rouge.com.au), Jousse conjures what he disdainfully regards as the nightmare of *stockage*—roughly, "stockpiling"—in the land of DVD consumption. We dutifully acquire a large swathe of what comes onto the market—but often more in the spirit of archival preservation than for the sake of immediate engagement, or even enjoyment. The phenomenon Jousse describes is no doubt common to all collecting manias: how often have we encountered the eccentric, obsessive book or music collector who seems scarcely to have a moment (as they line their alphabetical shelves with armfuls of latest purchases) to ever read or listen to the stuff they store away "for future reference"?

The spreading disease of DVD *stockage* especially relates, in Jousse's view, to the proliferating special editions and boxed sets that often cloak themselves in the surplus value of scholarship: audio commentaries, documentation of varying versions, reproductions of original promotional graphics . . . There is a crippling air of respectability—more exactly, a kind of overweening *respectfulness*—in many DVD releases feted as "important." (When did you last hear an audio commentary that actually said anything negative—indeed, anything less than wildly enthusiastic—about the film it accompanies? It doesn't take much for scholars to become spruikers in the land of DVD.)

The deathly shroud of the *already known* hangs heavy over DVD culture—even when it concerns a film we have not yet seen! It's a kind of privatized museumification of cinema—a phenomenon that is truly unprecedented in the medium's history. How different this is to the situation of twenty years ago when—as I recall the vibe in Australia—gangs of dedicated, usually left-of-field critics declared that the age of VHS had ushered in a collective dream of "marginal criticism": new kinds of writing and analysis to match the exciting influx of rare, strange, and hitherto-unseen items on the market. And, indeed, much of the most vital commentary on genres such as horror came directly from this particular consumer revolution in which the consumers did not always behave as the market expected them to. And all this happened because VHS usually didn't come with what Jousse suspiciously calls the "university apparatus" of knowledge.

All these thoughts rushed into my mind as I fondled the very handsome British Film Institute set of the shorts (mainly animated) of the Czech master Jan Švankmajer—a collection spanning 1964 to 1992, from his early Mannerism to his most mature (and most personal) Surrealism. Impressed with the lovingly detailed work, the devoted scholarship, and the heroic effort of preservation that has clearly gone into this remarkable release, I started to think of it as another monumental addition to my already-groaning shelves. But, starting to look at the films, I realized how problematic this response was here. Far from being monumental, Švankmajer's work is devastating, preoccupied with erosion and decay, as in the celebrated image from *Dimensions of Dialogue* (1982) that is on the cover. The contending heads are being torn apart.

The truth is, this collection is utterly overwhelming—in the best possible way. It is physically, mentally, and emotionally impossible to watch—properly watch in an engaged way—more than one or two of these shorts at a time. (Even the DVD's helpful pedagogic suggestion of "programmes"—strings of films around given themes—are a bit much to digest all at once.) Given the proper attention it deserves, how could one rush on after watching *Food* (1992), in which the expendable human body becomes an automatic food dispensary for coffee and sausages? Is it the impact that such a work has in isolation key to what Michael O'Pray, in his excellent introductory text, means when he boldly proposes that "the work induces a kind of critical and cultural trauma"? Taken in turn, each work is dense, multi-layered, compact, demanding, exhausting. Taken together, they can all look and sound a bit the same: zany, annoying, obsessive

Jousse, in his polemic, opts for cable channel-surfing over DVD as a way to generate new, lively criticism. His argument, ultimately, hinges on an old, familiar distaste for frame-by-frame analysis: too static, too finnicky, too much like conventional art history. But there is another way to think this through, especially in relation to Švankmajer. Animation, more than any other form of cinema, depends on the crucial relation between the single frame—each twenty-fourth of a second individually, painstakingly built—and the apparatus

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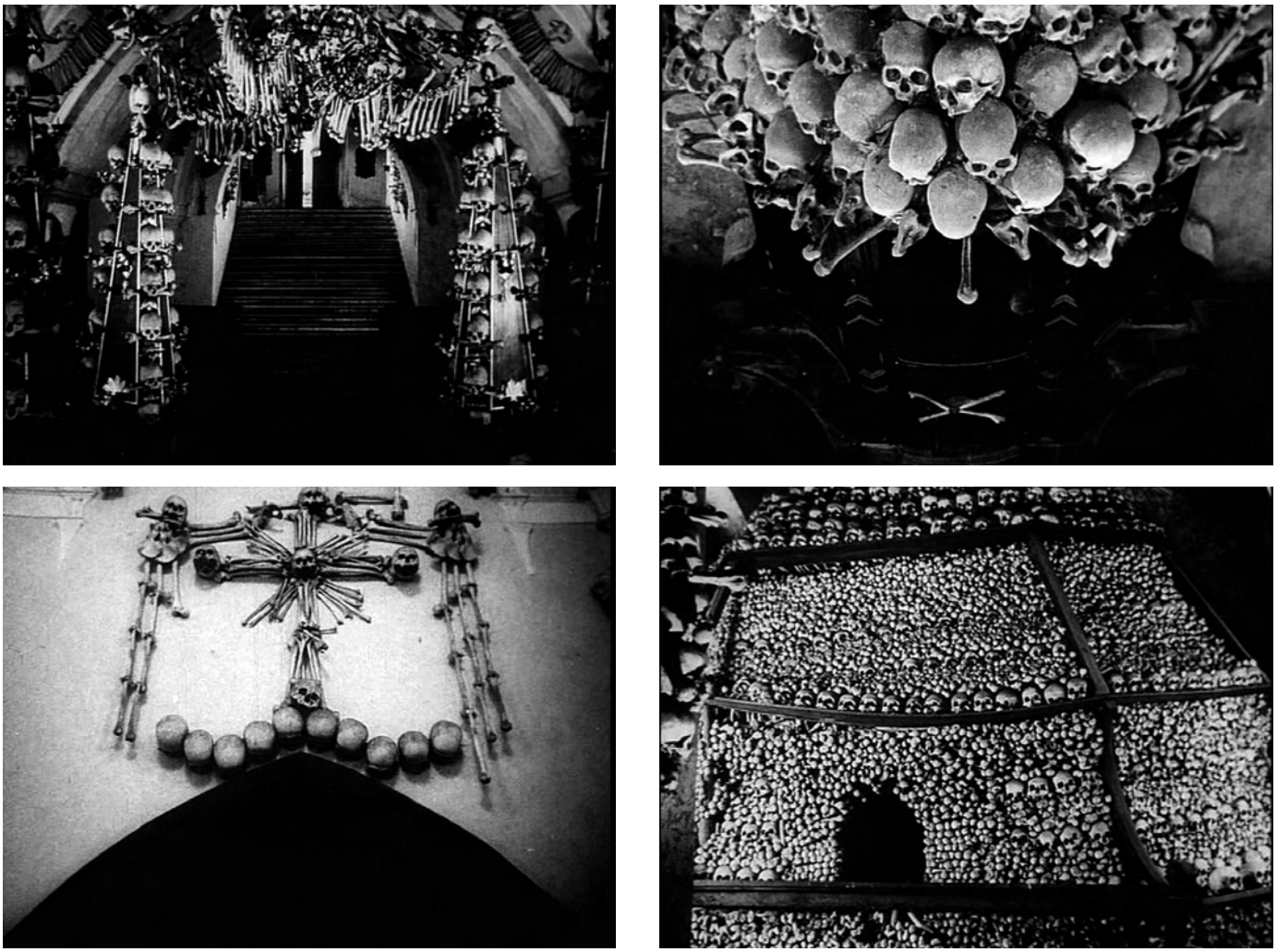

Shots from *The Ossuary* (Krátký Film, 1970). DVD: BFI (U.K.)

that effaces this frame in movement. It's no accident that, thirty-five years ago, the great critic and video artist Thierry Kuntzel (who died April 2007) turned to animation in order to seize a sequence of frames (from Peter Foldes's 1964 *Appetite of a Bird*) and demonstrate what is normally unseen in the traditional filmic flow. DVD truly comes into its own here: freezing the flow of a Švankmajer film and studying the tiny but compelling articulations from one frame to the next allows us to relive that moment in history when Raymond Bellour described the pedagogical act of stilling the moving image (thanks to the then-radical technology of the "analytic projector") as offering an "apprenticeship in magic" (though in the case of Švankmajer, it is surely a case of black magic).

Such a slowing-down, demystifying approach does have its drawbacks. In this case, it risks passing over sounds that any contemporary DJ worth his or her salt would want to immediately sample: a major revelation of this DVD set is the music of early Švankmajer collaborator Zdenek Liska, whose scratchy, funky, *musique concrète* loops seem at least thirty years ahead of their time. Nevertheless, probably the best way to acknowledge the traumatic aspect of this ferocious work is to linger closely on the frames in very small, even microscopic doses: to study the appearances, disappearances, and metamorphoses of the grotesque puppet figures in *The Last Trick* (1964) and *Punch and Judy* (1966); to slow down the blizzard of zip-pans and cuts that offer us inventories of doors, locks, and wall cracks in *J.S. Bach—Fantasy in G Minor* (1965); to count the dozens or hundreds of skeleton bones and skulls amassed in each image of the disquieting documentary *The Ossuary* (1970—although the booklet promises an alternate soundtrack to this which I could not access); to track the precise self-construction of a human head from its various organs and innards in *Darkness, Light, Darkness* (1989).

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DVD DATA *Jan Švankmajer: The Complete Short Films.* Director: Jan Švankmajer. Multiple copyright holders. Publisher: BFI DVD Publishing, 2007. £29.99, 3 discs.

CRUISING

"The leather scene of *Cruising* is simply a background for a murder mystery." Ever since the filming of *Cruising* was being disrupted by New York gay protesters in 1979, William Friedkin has made this point so often that, in his commentary on *Cruising*'s new DVD edition, doubtless impatient to be done with it once for all, he gives it the self-evidence of tautology: "The background of the leather bars . . . is simply a unique background." But no amount of mantric repetition can change the fact that where *Cruising* is concerned, the leather scene, precisely for its "unique" aspect, is not, nor ever was, simply a background. On the contrary, without this background, Friedkin himself was not interested in the murder mystery. When he was first asked to adapt Gerald Walker's 1970 source novel, whose homosexuals were slender, wore bangs, and did not, biblically speaking, know their ass from their elbow, he took a bored pass. That was before, wearing nothing but a jockstrap, and (just in case) accompanied by an armed mafia escort in the same costume, he started venturing into the Mine Shaft to see for himself the lately developed gay sex scene there. What he witnessed was galvanizing; it persuaded him that the novel, reset in this new milieu, could work on screen. His nocturnal visits recur in the film itself, where they are now paid by the protagonist Steve Burns (Al Pacino), a straight undercover cop who must infiltrate New York's gay leather bars and clubs in pursuit of a Homo Killer. The correspondent tracking shots are what made *Cruising* thrilling in 1980; and even today, they remain unbanalizable.

It is easy to see why. Meandering through the darkness of bars whose patrons are as likely to be sucking dick as swilling beer—and where even that beer seems destined to be pissed out on the men expectantly sitting in bathtubs for the purpose—the shots cast an almost blinding illumination on a sexuality that had been so far much *more* in shadow as to be, until now, cinematically invisible. From being barely able to suggest what two gay men did at home between sheets, Hollywood suddenly proceeds to grant us a full and accurate idea of what scores of them were doing at the Anvil in slings. Very little *cruising* takes place in these shots (and that little appears satisfactorily concluded in fantastically short compass); most of the men are already getting off. No sad, solitary longing here; instead, a superabundant spectacle, as crowded with bodies as a Bosch painting, of acts and pleasures. The protesters were surely right to claim that *Cruising* continues a long Hollywood tradition of equating the homosexual and the homicidal, but in its predecessors—most notably Hitchcock's *Rope* (1948) and *Strangers on a Train* (1951)—the homicidal was *all* we saw; even to let us see the "sexual" in the "homosexual" to *any* extent, let alone as copiously as Friedkin has done, is a territorial conquest worthy of Cortez. And James Contner's cinematography rises to the occasion, washing the frieze of leather men with an ethereal blue light—exquisite halo for the denim and hardware on them—so that they stand out from their nooks and crannies like gilded saints in so many side-chapels. It is scored to terrific original music from The Germs, whose punk pulsations, like everything else here, are too insistent to be just background.

For all their manifest aesthetic enhancement, these shots also carry documentary power. To the brave new world being imaged, Friedkin brought the authenticating procedures of neo-realism, using actual locations and mixing nonprofessionals in with his actors. These extras, not merely culled from the scene, were filmed actually performing the acts suggested. "I didn't give any direction to the people in these scenes; I just asked them to do their thing and let me film it." Though it lacks pornography's explicitness, the film shares in pornography's Bazinian embrace of the "ontology of the photographic image." The real places aren't simply like these; these *are* those places; the men in the background aren't simply got up to resemble the men in the places; they *are* those men. Their nipple-play isn't just play—or to put it differently, it's *just* play, not the demanding "work" that it would be supposed to be for union extras. *Cruising*'s diora-

Revolutionary asses. © 1980 Lorimar Film-und Fernsehproduktion GmbH.

DVD: Warner Home Video, 2007

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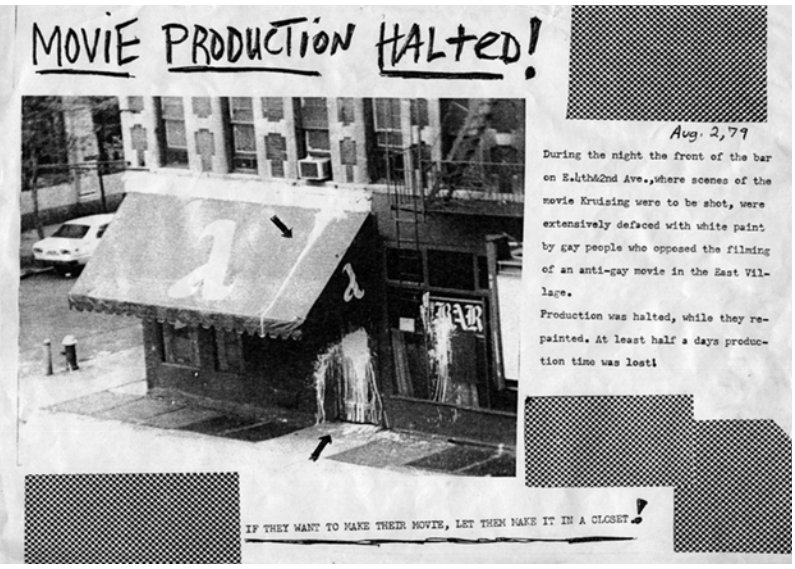

An original flyer protesting against the production of "Kruising." Courtesy Mark Simon

mas convince us that *gay sex happens* and this, in a culture vitally concerned with destroying every trace of homosexual desire, is by no means a universally self-evident proposition. Arthur Bell, instigator of the protests, feared that *Cruising* might well "send gays running back to the closet," but this misunderstands the probative force of the film's near-pornography. It is much more likely to have sent closeted gays running to the clubs to confirm its verisimilitude. We had not previously seen anything remotely like this depiction on screen, and the happy historical moment that favored it—after Gay Liberation but before AIDS, when curious straight men like Friedkin (due precaution taken) could indulge their fascination with the scene—is unlikely to be repeated.

⁂

Friedkin grasps the originality of the scene quite as much as did Michel Foucault, who saw in these "laboratories of sexual experimentation," as he called the SM backrooms of New York and San Francisco, a reinvention of sex, where "the idea is to make use of every part of the body as a sexual instrument." Prominent in *Cruising*'s laboratories, certainly, is the anal caress, a fondness for which is attested both by the many red and navy blue handkerchiefs protruding from back pockets and, with less formality, by the abundance of bare asses on parade. No longer privatized, but proudly displayed, tattooed, hairy, even dirty, these backsides (like the background *in toto*) insist on coming to the fore of our attention. But this anal responsiveness strays not only to other parts of the body (the armpits to be sniffed, the nipples to be chewed or tugged), but also to the body as a whole. Sometimes, indeed, the plugging-in of sex organs seems almost incidental to what is more fundamentally an ecstatic, X-rated cuddle whose goal is to put every body in total erotic contact with every other.

Rather than anything more shocking, then, the sexiest practice depicted here, the one that comes nearest to incarnating full body-readiness for each and every kind of embrace, is dancing. The dance floor provides a kind of sexual antechamber, where bodies, helpfully chloroformed with bandanas soaked in ethyl chloride, anticipate all manner of exposure, touching, grouping. That is why the moment when Steve joins the dancing offers the most satisfying "gaying" of his character possible, all the more ingenious in that, given that he's "the Pacino character," we would never be allowed anything more explicit in any case. Unlike the conventionally coupled gay ballroom-dancing in *Philadelphia* (1993), Steve's dancing extends tangibility over his whole body: so that *whoever* eventually touches that body—including his girlfriend Nancy (Karen Allen)—and *wherever* it is touched, including the least exceptionable spots—it has already wholly been given over to the homosexual drift. That is the implied meaning of the last shot, where Steve, his assignment over, shaves in front of a mirror; there, along with his haunted image, he discerns his Nancy behind him, wearing his leathers. *Whom* he has sex with will no longer prove much; his body has been desublimated, released from the organizational grip of sexual orientation. Is he now homosexual? All that seems certain is that he's no longer *not*. He's been queered.

⁂

The people and streets of Rome in *Open City* (1945) feel as if caught *sur le vif*, but the Good Priest, the Homosexual Villain, the Sacrificial Mother, the Youth of Tomorrow, and so on, are plainly myths recycled from nineteenth-century fiction via Hollywood. This dissonance between background and story (characters, situations, dialogue) is basic to the neo-realist project, wherever it emerges; more, it is what the project exists to harmonize, promoting ideology to the status of the real while reducing the real to the ideological meanings it hosts. In *Cruising*, however, the neo-realist enterprise is given this turn of the screw: the authenticity of the bar sequences sanctions the film's punitive wish to annihilate what it has glimpsed in them.

Follow the fist in this tightly compacted passage in the chapter called "Wanna Dance?" First we see a scene of fist-fucking—extreme in any case, unprecedented on the Hollywood screen; there are shots of both partners, but our vision is mainly oriented by the man in the sling. We cut to a close-up of Steve watching from further back in the same perspective, his huge eyes as utterly engrossed as Friedkin's must have been on his first visit to the Mine Shaft, or for that matter, as our own are likely to be at this very moment. Then, all of a

sudden, a fist fight breaks out between two patrons elsewhere in the club. The close-up of Steve looking marks—and masks—the transition between description and narrative: on one side of it, anonymous background figures who, however titillating, play no role in the unfolding story; on the other side, the arrival of a professional actor (Jay Acovone) playing a suspect, and in his train, dramatic incident, enigma, psychology; the plot has visibly thickened. Under other circumstances, we might have observed that the verisimilitude—and perhaps reality—of the fisting has yielded to the almost comic implausibility—and unquestionable fictiveness—of a fist fight in a gay club. But in this instance, any such perception is overwhelmed by the *force majeure* of a different sort of logic: the logic that would link, in any normal man, the prospect of being fisted to the speedy erection of his own dukes in defense. (The fighting words here: "Hey, asshole!")

Of course, Steve is not about to be fisted, nor is he involved in the fist fight. He occupies a middle position between the two possibilities, not directly participating either in the "extreme sex" practiced by the gays, or in the violence that, albeit also here practiced by the gays, feels like its homophobic negation. But he's shown taking them both in, as part of the same exorbitant eyeful; through these wholly fascinated eyes, he internalizes the diptych as what will become his own psychomachia, and, ambiguously, his own narrative trajectory. It is important to note how merely *implicit* all this is, even mystified. "Two gays, neither of whom I know, are using their fists on one another": this is the ambiguous

Steve's Dream of the Fist. © 1980 Lorimar Film-und Fernsehproduktion GmbH. DVD: Warner Home Video (U.S.)

Freudian dream that Steve entertains, and in it, his identification with both "victim" and "attacker" is buried alive in the self-ignorant relation of a fascination with the Other. Once we move from the background to a murder mystery starring Al Pacino, we say a decisive farewell to neo-realism, and hello again to the celluloid closet, with all its strictly epistemological excitements. This closet gets reinstalled both in the story, as Steve's secret, "repressed" desire, so constantly under social censorship that we can barely be sure of its reality, and in the story's filming, as Friedkin's corresponding style of innuendo, ambiguity, elision, symbolism, and displacement. Having just seen gay sex unambiguously presented in the background, we re-enter the old hopeful/fearful state of "wondering" whether it will ever materialize in the foreground, just as we once wondered, in *Rope*, whether the insinuated homosexuality of the protagonists would ever find denotation.

The abundance of evidence that homosexual desire no longer has to take this form seems only to have sharpened the vengeance with which it must now be repudiated. For Steve's Dream of the Fist replicates the film's own expedient fantasy, already in place, of an unidentified Homo Killer, a gay who murders gays in the very impetus of gay desire. In this fantasy, there is no gay sex unaccompanied by gay violence, as its intrinsic punitive counteraction: no butt-fucking without back-stabbing, no blow job without spurts of blood in place of cum; no polymorphous perversity without the body literally in pieces and floating in the Hudson. These are sides of the same coin, and the coin could hardly be in wider circulation. In the novel, there was only one murderer to be hunted, but in the film, he is ubiquitous, his identity having been pointedly disseminated across a number of different actors and characters: the killer in murder no. 1 is the victim in murder no. 2, while the actor who *plays* the victim in murder no. 1 is . . . The idea is to establish a symbolic circuit whereby every gay man, at varying degrees of separation, becomes his own assassin. But—here's the rub—the circuit is never quite closed; the overwhelmingly visible spectacle of gay male sex may be simply irresistible to any man who beholds it, and remain so even after its violent recloseting. In the final frenzy of his repression, Steve has probably killed his only gay friend; but given the sexual ambiguity of "murder" in the film, the homicide hardly de-homosexualizes him. The last shot insists that, however far he has removed himself from the scene, he will never remove its inscription from his pupils.

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Faced with this coolly furious fantasy of gays loving/killing each other and—as we contract their homosexuality through our vulnerably wide-open eyes—turning each of us into a gay lover/killer, too, one is almost tempted to say that, if the AIDS epidemic hadn't happened, our culture would have had to invent it, as its exorbitant defense against the spill of gay sexual radicalism. Right after *Cruising*, in fact, the culture would proceed to do just that: invent AIDS, the "gay disease," Nature's rebuke to unnatural practices, God's way of weeding his garden, and all the rest. The film's banal paranoia would become horribly so. We must give the protestors this credit: before AIDS, they recognized the structure of AIDS panic.

Yet *Cruising* deserves a better queer analysis than they offered. To hear them go on, you'd have thought this "brutal arena" (as one of their flyers described it) was all Friedkin's sinister devising, and not the marvelous pleasure quarters it was for so many gay men, much less the momentous counter-cultural project described by Foucault or Guy Hocquenghem, who proclaimed: "Our assholes are revolutionary!" And let's be honest: would Martin Scorsese, with a mafia escort, have ever put on a jockstrap and descended into the Mine Shaft? Friedkin is openly as well as keenly curious about radical gay sexual practice, and, however much he may seek to protect himself or his viewers from its consequences, this curiosity visibly—ineffaceably—structures his film. The protesters' disingenuous, sex-phobic public relations have led the way to the present deplorable state of affairs where all mainstream gay male representation aspires to the flaccid edification of an After-School Special, and the only gay men with a right to speak on the *New York Times* OpEd page are married with children! No doubt, *Cruising* lays down the same paranoid postulate as the classic thriller: *the homosexual will make us all homosexual*. (Guy to Bruno in *Strangers on a Train:* "Now you've got *me* acting guilty.") But the classic thriller also worked the paranoia through, via the death of the Homosexual, to the restored psychic health of its protagonist; in the end, it was as much of a marriage plot as *As You Like It*. But, signally failing to accomplish this achievement, *Cruising* instead shows that the paranoid defense against homosexual desire—albeit never before defended against more violently than here—can no longer be imagined with a successful outcome. This irresolution spoils the movie—spoils it, precisely, as a murder mystery. Responsible for the flaw, of course, is the background that refuses to stay in its designated marginal place. Having at long last seen this background, we can hardly avoid recognizing that we are *all* in it now, right up to our eyeballs.

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DVD DATA *Cruising*. Director: William Friedkin. © 1980 Lorimar Film-und Fernsehproduktion GmbH. Publisher: Warner Home Video, 2007. $19.97, 1 disc.

SOME THOUGHTS ON FILM HISTORY

EDWARD BUSCOMBE

What is film history, exactly? A long time ago I taught a seminar on this topic at the University of Iowa, and one of the books we used was E. H. Carr's *What Is History?* Doubtless professional historians now regard this work (published in 1961) as somewhat outmoded, but Carr still has stimulating and provocative things to say. One chapter is devoted to the relationship between historical accounts and "facts." Despite deconstructionist attacks on the whole concept of "objective" knowledge, we still obstinately cling to the notion that history is about real events which can be verified. But of course that does not begin to address the complexities of the structures of signification within which facts are embedded. It is a fact that Orson Welles directed *Citizen Kane* (1941). But what do we mean by "directed" exactly? In what did his direction consist? And is that the same as saying he is the author (or the auteur) of the movie? And who was Orson Welles anyway? Or should that be "Orson Welles"? Books are still being written attempting to explain this complex figure.

Carr has a chapter on the changing ways in which historical practice has conceptualized the relationship of the individual to society, a matter which has great relevance to a problem within film history which has still not received the attention which it deserves. I am speaking of the ways in which we understand the contribution of the individual talent to the making and the meaning of a film, in short the problem of the auteur. Despite claims about "the death of the author," the idea of the film director as the creator of the film refuses to die; indeed, it is now an established part of critical discourse within film reviewing. And yet clearly films cannot be only the expression of an individual sensibility. The systems of meaning in play do not originate entirely within an individual consciousness.

Another Carr chapter concerns the vexed question of causality in history. Why do historical events happen when they do, and in the way they do? In film history what weight do we give to economic determinations, to institutional practices, to technological developments, to ideological structures, and to the chance occurrence of individual actions? Contemporary film history has made great progress in uncovering the many determinations that bear upon films, but though now we can identify many causes, we hesitate to put them in a hierarchy. Once, Marxist film historians liked to say that economics was ultimately determining, if only "in the last instance." Is that what we still believe? In filling in the details we seem strangely reluctant to look at the larger picture.

Yet another chapter in Carr's book addresses the extent to which we can perceive patterns in history, and in particular whether one can find any evidence of "progress" in the history of the human race. This again has special relevance to film, which has often been told as a story of increasing technical and artistic sophistication, each invention standing on the shoulders of the last as film climbs towards greater and greater "realism." Even if the films of today are not necessarily regarded as the peak of achievement, there is often an overall sense that cinema has got better.

Carr concludes with some remarks about how history has changed, from an earlier stance which focused almost entirely upon the activities of a social elite, toward giving due weight to the activities of the common people. Similarly, it has broadened its horizons, becoming less centered on developments in one or two favored countries and taking more of a balanced world view. One can certainly see that film history over the past few years has moved away from its previous exclusive concern with America and Western Europe, towards a wider global perspective. Whether it has also moved away from a narrow focus on a small number of films and filmmakers is more debatable. In any general film history, no matter how the conceptual framework shifts it still tends to be the same few films that are discussed, over and over again.

These thoughts are provoked by reading *Film Histories: An Introduction and Reader*. It's an ambitious work that seeks to introduce students to a variety of approaches to film history, mostly of recent origin. Its structure is somewhat unusual, in that it marries a chronological narrative of the entire history of cinema, broken up into short chapters, starting from the earliest inventions and proceeding up to the present, with a selection of examples of film history in action, an anthology

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of writings by a score or more scholars exemplifying different approaches. In a very real sense, therefore, this is two books, one a potted history, competent, reasonably inclusive given the space available, but for the most part conventional; the other an anthology of current best practice in the film-historical field. (There are a few errors in the editors' own text worth recording, though they don't substantially undermine the general level of professionalism. *The Wild One* [1953] is not Elia Kazan's [307]. Howard Hughes's *The Outlaw* [1943] is not in 3D [307]; I wonder if this error arises from IMDB's assertion that Jane Russell's breasts were size 36D? *Shane* [1953] is not in CinemaScope [344]. Katharine Hepburn, Steven Spielberg, and Judy Davis are all misspelled.)

In calling the editors' narrative of film history "conventional" I mean several things. Firstly, they proceed in strict chronological order. The sense that history is "one damn thing after another" is notoriously difficult to get away from, and from that follows all too often the assumption of *post hoc ergo propter hoc*, that is to say, falsely assuming that if something happens after something else it is therefore caused by the prior event. I don't say that I have a better model to put in place, and when you have only limited space anything more complex and innovative in methodology becomes extremely difficult. But I do think that in a book of which the whole purpose is to get students to interrogate the practice of history itself, there ought to be more self-consciousness about the particular model that the editors themselves are following. They might have explained why they chose to tell the story this way.

One might say much the same about the vexed question of which films are to be privileged within the narrative. No history can possibly do more than mention a tiny fraction of all the films that have ever been made (has anyone ever done an estimate of the total?). But on which principles does the historian make his or her selection of those which are to be discussed? The editors show themselves aware of such a question: "[The work of Barbra] Streisand demonstrates that one of the problems with existing histories of the 1970s is the tendency to concentrate on films that are distinguished by their artistic credentials rather than by their industrial significance or importance to audiences" (442). And not only of the 1970s, one might add. However, it's easy enough to pose the problem. It might be interesting to pursue the matter further. What would a film history look like if it discussed only those films which were a hit at the box office, and ignored commercial failures even though they had been praised critically? At certain points the editors appear to be attempting this very thing. In their account of Hollywood in the 1980s they refer not only to prominent auteurs such as David Lynch and John Sayles, but also such hits as *The Karate Kid* and *Ghostbusters* (both 1984), which have no recognized artistic pedigree. But they fail to offer a full explanation of such choices. What might we gain from such an approach, and what would be lost? Students could learn much from such a discussion.

One of the most curious things about the editors' own historical practice is the complete absence of any sources for their history of cinema. This is all the more strange because in the questions which they pose to students about each text they anthologize, again and again they encourage them to interrogate the author's use of sources ("Assess the sources Schaefer deploys in his study. Can you differentiate between his primary and his secondary sources?" [380]) Yet their own history, running to tens of thousands of words, has no footnotes whatsoever. There is a general bibliography, but we can't tell which of the books included played a part in the formation of the editors' own history. Clearly they are heavily reliant on the work of others, as all historians must be. But nowhere is there any indication of what reading contributes to their own narrative of cinema.

I well remember being taken to task by Douglas Gomery (whose work appears in this book) for something I had written in *Screen* back in the mid-1970s. Gomery asserted, and he was quite right, that despite criticizing the methodology of previous historians of the film industry, I had not provided chapter and verse for some statements I had made. Now that time has lessened the embarrassment for me, I'd like to quote his words at some length, since they are so relevant here: "In the past, historians of the American film industry have not even followed the most basic practices of the field. Few explain the basic methodologies they employ. More surprisingly, almost as few cite their sources. Footnotes by film historians are rare items. No other brand of history is so casual in violating this basic attribute of scholarship. Edward Buscombe himself falls into this trap. Except for two internal citations, one with no page given, his 12-page history of Columbia Pictures is note free. One must not only wonder how he created his historical passages concerning the rise of this firm in the 1920's . . . Is Buscombe just recycling the very myths he asks us to question? Without footnotes, or even a bibliography, the reader can never know" (*Screen* 17, no. 1 [1976]: 41).

In this respect at least, film historians have become much more professional. Footnotes are not only a courtesy to those whose work we have benefited from. They allow the reader to assess with what authority the author makes his or her statements, an issue that goes to the heart of the truth claims which any history makes for itself.

Despite the fact that the editors' own history of film takes up over 200 pages, it is the selection of writings by other

scholars that forms the heart of the book. The authors included are a mixture of well-respected senior figures such as Richard Abel, Tom Gunning, Janet Staiger, Thomas Elsaesser, and Tino Balio, together with younger writers, several new to me. Most of the contributions are relatively recent, dating from the 1990s or later, though there are one or two from the 1980s.

A number of things strike one forcibly about the selection. In the first place, the emphasis is overwhelmingly on issues to do with production, distribution, or exhibition. In other words, film history is presented as being mainly a matter of understanding the industry. I find there's a certain irony here, because my 1970s *Screen* piece about the history of Columbia Studios lamented the fact that at that time there were very few serious studies of industry history. Almost no one had embarked on a systematic investigation of how cinema worked as a business (studio records were still largely closed to scholars), and how this impacted on the nature of the films that were made. Now, it seems, film history has become almost synonymous with the study of the institutional nature of film.

Of course there is great variety in the approach of these authors to industrial questions. Some, such as Tino Balio and Douglas Gomery in their descriptions of, respectively, Columbia Pictures and of cinema building, offer accounts which see cinema as a business, with executives making rational investment decisions based on strategies for maximizing profits. Films themselves, even if mentioned, are not analyzed; the focus is elsewhere.

Other authors choose to deal with distribution. Cynthia Erb's work on *King Kong* (1933) shows how marketing strategies can materially affect a film's reception. Decisions about whether to promote the film as horror, as a jungle film, or as a romance directly influenced audience response. The notion that a film's meaning is not fixed but up to a point negotiable is now a commonplace, but having concrete examples of how this can work in practice is invaluable. Similarly Kevin Heffernan's study of how *Night of the Living Dead* (1968) was originally marketed on its first release demonstrates the relative fluidity of genre categories despite critics' best efforts to fix them. Much the same can be said of Thomas Austin's examination of how Francis Ford Coppola's *Bram Stoker's Dracula* (1992) was sold to the public.

Audience reception has been something of a growth area within Film Studies recently. Each of the above three works necessarily take the audience into account in looking at distribution, and further extracts in this volume concentrate on specific aspects of how films are actually read. Critical commentary is one way in which audiences may be influenced, and Haidee Wasson's discussion of the career of Iris Barry is an entertaining and illuminating look at how a critic may make a mark. Barbara Klinger's intelligent dissection of the shifts in critical responses to the films of Douglas Sirk is equally valuable. By contrast, Lee Grieveson's examination of audiences in Chicago during the early years of the movies focuses on how systems of regulation, including censorship, actually helped to construct one kind of audience rather than another.

Only around a quarter of the extracts choose to focus more specifically on the films themselves. This balance may be a deliberate choice on the part of the editors, but it also reflects an undoubted shift within film history over the past generation. It's unthinkable now that an undergraduate degree in Film Studies could fail to include a substantial amount of teaching about the way in which the film industry works, and many of the pieces in this collection offer admirable accounts of various aspects of the business, such as Janet Wasko's look at the rise of the VCR, or Justin Wyatt's investigation of the so-called "independent" distributors in the New Hollywood. But ultimately, of course, what one hopes is that film analysis and industry analysis (and, let it be said, social analysis) will, despite the need to focus on specifics, eventually be integrated. Industry analysis without regard to the actual films which are produced is no more than a branch of economics; it's a valid field of study, but not enough in itself. Conversely, film analysis conducted in isolation from the context which has caused those films to be made is a blinkered exercise in aestheticism.

That said, the reconciling of the two is easier to preach than to practice. Fortunately this book contains two admirable examples of how it might be done. In the first place there is Janet Staiger's examination of how in the early years of Hollywood the development of certain ways of organizing production, specifically the move towards more cost-effective shooting methods, had a material effect on representational practices and on film style. As the editors say in their introduction to Staiger's work, it "provides a bridge between economic and film analysis" (75).

In a slightly different way, Thomas Elsaesser's essay on German silent cinema seeks to arrive at the meaning of such classics as *The Student of Prague* (1913) by relating stylistic and textual features, such as their deployment of the "fantastic," to the social and material bases of Weimar society. Elsaesser's argument about the exact nature of that relationship is more dense and complex than that of any of the other authors in this anthology, and students would perhaps have benefited from a bit more introduction than it receives, but since what he is attempting is more ambitious than the others one can hardly complain about difficulty.

One of the most important developments within film history over recent years has been an increasing attention to issues around race and ethnicity, gender, and sexuality. It's obvious that the editors are alert to these shifts of emphasis. Jackie Stacey's work on female spectators, Charles Ambler's innovative study of black film audiences in colonial Rhodesia, Kevin Heffernan's analysis of the African American audience for *Night of the Living Dead*, and Barbara Klinger's examination of the relations between Sirk's melodramas and culturally despised forms such as soap operas, traditionally the preserve of a female audience, all resist the homogenizing tendency of earlier film history to assume that there was only one kind of audience, and that a white, middle-class, male one. If there is no text here which offers a gay perspective, then the editors' own history does at certain points address issues around gay cinema.

If there is one area where some might feel the balance of the selections is not quite right, it is in the area of Third World cinema. Of course we have to recognize that Hollywood is far and away the dominant cinema in the world. No other national cinema can ignore it, no matter how hard it attempts to challenge Hollywood's hegemony. So it would be harsh to take the editors too much to task for the preponderance of work about American cinema. All the same, given the large and impressive amount of scholarship that has been devoted recently to the cinemas of Africa, Latin America, Asia, and the Middle East, it does seem a shame that out of twenty-four selections only two deal with cinema from these regions. One of these, Randal Johnson's account of Cinema Novo, is concerned with a movement essentially of the 1960s and 70s, leaving Leon Hunt's exploration of Hong Kong cinema as the only piece which centers on contemporary films from outside the metropolis.

The editors might argue that the selections have been made not with a view to ensuring coverage of all the major areas of world cinema, but rather on the extent to which they could offer variations within historical method. However, it's clear that the editors have worked hard to attain a chronological spread, from early cinema right up to the present, and a rather wider global perspective would surely not have been incompatible with the provision of a wide spectrum of historical approaches.

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AVANT-GARDE AND INDEPENDENT

R. BARTON PALMER

Where Does It Happen? John Cassavetes and Cinema at the Breaking Point by George Kouvaros

In an intriguing accident, symptomatic of the vagaries of film scholarship, two worthy volumes devoted to American independent director John Cassavetes have appeared together: the critical analysis by George Kouvaros currently under review and Marshall Fine's production history and professional biography, *Accidental Genius: How John Cassavetes Invented the American Independent Film* (Miramax, 2006). Perhaps most surprising is that neither of these books was written by Ray Carney, who has thoroughly dominated academic work on Cassavetes during the last two decades, of which more below. In any event, the two recent books nicely complement one another. Eschewing critical analysis almost entirely, Fine provides a detailed series of production histories of the Cassavetes *oeuvre*. Kouvaros, in contrast, only briefly goes over some of this same material (including the famous way in which the project that would become *Shadows* [1959] took shape, with Cassavetes in effect raising production money during an appearance on a radio talk show so that he could make a film "about people"). Kouvaros is more interested in providing a reading of the films that emphasizes Cassavetes' engagement, however much he may have disavowed it publicly, with specifically cinematic questions. He declares: "Rather than having very little to say about Cassavetes' work, Anglo-American film theory may have a great deal to say about these films, their operation and effect" (28). While Fine's book offers film academics a wealth of information about the director (most of which, naturally enough, is already well known in outline), Kouvaros intends to "examine critically a number of misconceptions that have gathered around [the films]" (xix), on the premise that "the formal inventiveness of the work [should] be granted as much importance as the biographical aspects of the life" (xv). In doing so, Kouvaros takes up "certain aspects of his films that have not received sustained attention" (xix).

Actually, as one might expect, these three aims are interestingly connected. To contest what Kouvaros sees as the overemphasis on "biographical aspects" is to reject the cult of personality, in other words that strong form of auteurism which has long been central to academic accounts of Cassavetes' work. The legend is, in some sense, that Cassavetes "invented" American independent filmmaking, a view established early by writers on the "Hollywood Renaissance" such as Diane Jacobs and James Monaco (whose early championing of Cassavetes in his wildly popular *American Film Now: The People, The Power, The Money, The Movies* [1979] strangely merits no mention in Kouvaros's account of the critical response to his work). To emphasize "formal inventiveness" is to offer an alternative to the largely interpretive line pursued by Carney, and to shed light on "certain aspects" that have not received much in the way of critical attention, is to shift the discussion away from what have been identified as the political or ideological themes in the films (their expression of that utopian desire for true community that Carney, in the title of one of his books on Cassavetes, terms "American dreaming"). Kouvaros, in short, wants to claim Cassavetes for various theoretical concerns (especially peformativity, as well as the permeable boundaries between textuality and "real life," on the one hand, and documentary and narrative fiction, on the other). In contrast to Jacobs and other film historians, however, the movement that Kouvaros wants to situate Cassavetes within is not the French New Wave-influenced Hollywood Renaissance, but rather Direct Cinema, with whose practitioners Cassavetes is shown to share not only techniques (handheld camera, use of 16mm stock, and so forth), but also important theoretical problematics such as the relationship between representation and performance. If Carney offers a Cassavetes who shares much in common with Ralph Waldo Emerson, Kouvaros invites us to see that the director's work resembles the films of Shirley Clarke, Lionel Rogosin, and Jean Rouch.

Where Does it Happen? (a title that calls attention to the problematic interrelationship of performative/fictional events and identities) offers a series of approaches to the purported radical formalism of Cassavetes' films. Chapter two explores the connection the director shares with the practitioners of Direct Cinema, while chapter three focuses more narrowly on "the charging of performance to the breaking point" (xix) in *Woman Under the Influence* (1974). The next two chapters deal respectively with the trope of theater (as explored in *The Killing of a Chinese Bookie* [1976] and *Opening Night* [1977]) and burlesque performance as it "is brought into collision with the dramas and emotional crises of everyday life" (ibid.). Kouvaros, as he makes clear, is not interested in offering a comprehensive approach to the Cassavetes *oeuvre*, but rather in concentrating on those films that he feels are most illustrative of the more general points about the director's approach that he wishes to make. The book is written in an accessible, readable style, and Kouvaros demonstrates a thorough mastery of the subject matter and relevant secondary materials. Though heavily engaged with

theoretical questions, *Where Does It Happen?* is remarkably jargon-free, although not suited perhaps to the requirements of the general reader. Every page sparkles with insights and provocative observations. This is undoubtedly an important book about a crucial figure in the history of the American cinema.

A minor quibble is that to advance his agenda, Kouvaros feels obligated to undervalue the extensive work of Ray Carney, who, as they say, has no doubt "covered the waterfront." On the website he maintains to further the appreciation of Cassavetes, Carney claims ten books written on the director, these include both monographs and collected volumes (people.bu.edu/rcarney/cassavetes). I know of no other scholar who has produced such an extensive body of work on a single director (Carney, of course, is also a well-known promoter of independent filmmaking more generally). It may be true that there is a kind of humanist bias to Carney's work, but he is also very appreciative of the more radical nature of Cassavetes' work, particularly its promotion of indeterminacies of various kinds. Tellingly, Carney does name F. R. Leavis and Richard Poirier as his favorite literary critics—and we must surely read this homage as an indication of both his traditionality as a critic and his receptiveness of poststructuralist approaches. However much Carney might be a Leavisite, I do not think Kouvaros is correct in suggesting that Carney's approach is finally shaped by an "unreflexive attribution of a series of 'messages' to the films" or that he promotes Cassavetes as a "single-minded humanist working on the fringes of Hollywood" (27). My reading of Carney's work on Cassavetes does not agree with Kouvaros's view that for Carney these works, so admittedly rich in indeterminacies, are finally claimed absolutely for "meaning" by an "overarching authorial consciousness." To situate the provocative work of Cassavetes within a Godardian series of theoretical problematics does not mean that we cannot also appreciate the various ways in which these films engage with, and perhaps offer an opinion about, the need to connect meaningfully with others, which, we recall, is the Forsterian existential imperative so dear to Leavis's heart. Most admirers of *Husbands* (1970) and *Woman Under the Influence* would probably agree that such films speak eloquently to that unquenchable yet unsatisfiable desire, certainly a form of "American dreaming." © 2007 R. Barton Palmer

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BOOK DATA George Kouvaros, *Where Does It Happen? John Cassavetes and Cinema at the Breaking Point.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004. $57.00 cloth; $18.95 paper. 264 pages.

JOHN MACKAY

Lines of Resistance: Dziga Vertov and the Twenties, ed. Yuri Tsivian

Only a few short years ago, the only readily available book-length source in English on Dziga Vertov was the justly classic *Kino-Eye: The Writings of Dziga Vertov* (University of California Press, 1984), translated by Kevin O'Brien and edited and introduced by Annette Michelson. The major English language monographs on Vertov—I am thinking particularly of Vlada Petric's *Constructivism in Film* (Cambridge University Press, 1993) and two books (one on the early films and the other a still-invaluable "guide to resources") by Seth Feldman—had long been out of print; certainly, no monographs comparable to these major pioneering works appeared in the interim. Even though important articles and book chapters by Michelson, Malcolm Turvey, Jonathan Beller, Emma Widdis, and others continued to appear, the large-scale European renaissance in Vertov studies that began in the wake of the filmmaker's 1996 centenary—an occasion that produced important essay collections in Germany, France, and Austria, and an abundance of new Russian work, especially by Aleksandr Deriabin—had surprisingly little resonance in the English-speaking world.

The great exception here was the Kino Video DVD release (following an initial presentation at the Giornate del Cinema Muto in 1996) of *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929), complete with a historical reconstruction of the film's original music and a wonderful commentary track by Yuri Tsivian, who had already produced important work on Vertov in Russian in the 1980s. Tsivian also curated a major (and, for historians of silent cinema, thrilling) Vertov retrospective for the Giornate in October 2004. Substantial quantities of important new Vertov-related published material emerged directly from that festival event: specifically, the excellent film descriptions (mostly by Tsivian) in the Giornate's catalogue for that year, and the volume under review here, *Lines of Resistance: Dziga Vertov and the Twenties* (distributed in the U.S. by Indiana University Press), a superb compilation of critical articles and other materials, mostly Russian in origin but with some of English and German provenance as well, translated mainly by Julian Graffy, and edited and introduced by Tsivian. It is the finest and most thorough collection of Vertov criticism in any language, and a major boost to the "third wave" of Vertov studies now very much underway in North America, Europe, and Russia. (On the "three waves" in Vertov studies, see my review article "The 'Spinning Top' Takes Another Turn: Vertov Today," *KinoKultura*

theoretical questions, *Where Does It Happen?* is remarkably jargon-free, although not suited perhaps to the requirements of the general reader. Every page sparkles with insights and provocative observations. This is undoubtedly an important book about a crucial figure in the history of the American cinema.

A minor quibble is that to advance his agenda, Kouvaros feels obligated to undervalue the extensive work of Ray Carney, who, as they say, has no doubt "covered the waterfront." On the website he maintains to further the appreciation of Cassavetes, Carney claims ten books written on the director, these include both monographs and collected volumes (people.bu.edu/rcarney/cassavetes). I know of no other scholar who has produced such an extensive body of work on a single director (Carney, of course, is also a well-known promoter of independent filmmaking more generally). It may be true that there is a kind of humanist bias to Carney's work, but he is also very appreciative of the more radical nature of Cassavetes' work, particularly its promotion of indeterminacies of various kinds. Tellingly, Carney does name F. R. Leavis and Richard Poirier as his favorite literary critics—and we must surely read this homage as an indication of both his traditionality as a critic and his receptiveness of poststructuralist approaches. However much Carney might be a Leavisite, I do not think Kouvaros is correct in suggesting that Carney's approach is finally shaped by an "unreflexive attribution of a series of 'messages' to the films" or that he promotes Cassavetes as a "single-minded humanist working on the fringes of Hollywood" (27). My reading of Carney's work on Cassavetes does not agree with Kouvaros's view that for Carney these works, so admittedly rich in indeterminacies, are finally claimed absolutely for "meaning" by an "overarching authorial consciousness." To situate the provocative work of Cassavetes within a Godardian series of theoretical problematics does not mean that we cannot also appreciate the various ways in which these films engage with, and perhaps offer an opinion about, the need to connect meaningfully with others, which, we recall, is the Forsterian existential imperative so dear to Leavis's heart. Most admirers of *Husbands* (1970) and *Woman Under the Influence* would probably agree that such films speak eloquently to that unquenchable yet unsatisfiable desire, certainly a form of "American dreaming." © 2007 R. Barton Palmer

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BOOK DATA George Kouvaros, *Where Does It Happen? John Cassavetes and Cinema at the Breaking Point.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004. $57.00 cloth; $18.95 paper. 264 pages.

JOHN MACKAY

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8 [April 2005], www.kinokultura.com/articles/apr05-mackay.html. Since *Lines of Resistance* appeared, a German–English collection of essays and documents has been published under the auspices of the Austrian Film Museum, *Dziga Vertov: The Vertov Collection at the Austrian Film Museum*, ed. Thomas Tode and Barbara Wurm [SYNEMA, 2006].)

The materials in *Lines of Resistance*, though chronologically organized for the most part (thirty sections, subdivided into "The Beginning," "The Middle," and "The End"), comprise essentially five different types of text. First, we have Tsivian's introduction and his brief, witty, and insightful explicatory studies, complete with stills, on specific themes such as intertitles and the agit-trains of the Civil War period, and touching on all the films from the *Kino-Nedelia* newsreels (1918–19) through to *Man with a Movie Camera*. The bulk of the material that follows is made up of critical and often polemical articles about Vertov and his films, published in Soviet, German, U.S., and British journals, books, and newspapers from 1918 to 1932, though confined in their purview to the silent period. Interspersed with the articles are a few, mainly unpublished texts and drafts (with some facsimiles) by Vertov and others, including poetry, script proposals, a montage table, transcripts of discussions, letters, speeches, diatribes, interviews, and manifestos; additionally, Tsivian has included some carefully chosen non-interpretive materials directly related to the films and their exhibition, such as an excellent translation (by "T.S. Naivist") of the Whitmanian intertitles of *A Sixth Part of the World* (1926). The volume concludes with the best available filmography of Vertov's silent work, compiled by Tsivian and Aleksandr Deriabin. Deriabin, the foremost Vertov scholar in Russia today (and editor of a major 2004 collection in Russian of Vertov's scripts and proposals), did important filmographic and biographical research for the volume, with assistance from Oksana Sarkisova, Sarah Keller, and Theresa Scandiffio. The final result, as mediated by the excellent translations by Graffy (from Russian) and Stuart Liebman and Oliver Gayken (from German), is a meticulously annotated, well-indexed and elegantly presented work that both draws on and contributes to the most current Vertov scholarship as it is conducted worldwide.

The book holds many surprises as well. Even those who recall the heady Vertovian days of the late 1960s and early 70s and the Groupe Dziga Vertov may be struck by the filmmaker's sheer renown in the 20s as evidenced by *Lines of Resistance*. Collected here are critical treatments of Vertov written not only by famous Russians (Sergei Eisenstein, Aleksei Gan, Victor Shklovsky, Osip Brik, Lev Kuleshov, Kazimir Malevich, Mikhail Kaufman, Varvara Stepanova), but also by European and U.S. writers of the caliber of Walter Benjamin, Siegfried Kracauer, John Grierson, and Harry Alan Potamkin. (One very small quibble: it would have been nice to have some texts from French and other languages—though the book is admittedly full to overflowing as it is.) Equally importantly, *Lines of Resistance* gives readers without Russian the chance to appreciate the real brilliance of Soviet critics like Khrisanf Khersonsky, Naum Kaufman, Konstantin Feldman, Aleksandr Kurs, and others largely unknown in the West. What we get here for the most part are minds and voices *other* than Vertov's, although he puts in vivid appearances as well, especially in the revelatory sections on his disagreements with Eisenstein and Brik and on the Albrecht Blum plagiarism scandal. (In 1928, the German filmmaker Albrecht Blum released a found-footage film entitled *In the Shadow of the Machine* that incorporated parts of the last reel of Vertov's *The Eleventh Year* [1928] and bits of Dovzhenko's *Zvenigora* [1928]. Vertov found out about the unattributed borrowing only during his European trip during the summer and fall of 1929, precipitating the scandal in the German and Soviet press [377–82].) *Lines of Resistance* will enable readers to perceive for the first time the conceptual and institutional atmosphere—the specific "system of period pressures" (1), in Tsivian's phrase—within which Vertov worked and polemicized, and to see his now-familiar endorsements of "unplayed" and experimental cinema as part of a much wider early Soviet (and world) debate about documentary and proletarian art. Vertov's ideas, which can seem like dogmatic capsules when read in isolation, can now be interpreted as participating within a rich and still vital dialectic.

Tsivian's introduction both identifies and illuminates a number of the central themes of Vertov's cinematic and theoretical work as a whole—including the vexed role of intertitles in Vertov's documentaries, his relationship (artistic and personal) to Eisenstein, and the effect of Marxist explanatory procedures upon his film rhetoric—while brilliantly and concretely demonstrating the high degree to which Vertov's visual discourse was embedded in the cultural and political debates of his day. The interspersed studies are miniature models of close reading, and deftly manage to quilt together many of the concerns of the very disparate critical articles that surround them. *Lines of Resistance* should prove a major resource for students of Soviet, silent, documentary, and experimental cinema for a long time to come. © 2007 John MacKay

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BOOK DATA Yuri Tsivian (ed.), *Lines of Resistance: Dziga Vertov and the Twenties.* Sacile, Italy: Giornate del Cinema Muto, 2004. $45.00 cloth. 440 pages.

ALISON R. HOFFMAN

Women and Experimental Filmmaking, ed. Jean Petrolle and Virginia Wright Wexman

The inspiration for this collection of essays on female experimental filmmakers stems from a volume on women's experimental literature, *Breaking the Sequence: Women's Experimental Fiction* (Princeton University Press, 1989), edited by Ellen G. Friedman and Miriam Fuchs. Just as Friedman and Fuchs's strategic classification of "women's experimental literature" privileges the work of non-traditional female authors, so "women's experimental film," the category chosen by Petrolle and Wexman, "heightens the visibility of women's contributions to traditions of formal innovation and explores how formal innovation enables women to enlarge discourses about women's subjectivity" (3).

Each of the book's ten contributors put this category to use by teasing out various films' formal strategies and sociopolitical relevance. They demonstrate how their objects of study construct meanings that imagine, invent, and evaluate the sociopolitical, the historical, and the cinematic through their rigorous fusion of form and content. Each contributor maintains a close focus on women's experimental film, yet their methodologies and approaches are refreshingly open and hybrid, drawing from performance studies, literature, dance scholarship, and anthropology. Such methodological diversity, however, does not make for a random reading experience, but rather enriches the text as a whole. Throughout the collection the contributors respond to one another and four sub-categories emerge to give further cohesion to the volume: autobiography, the body, politics, and perception.

In the book's first chapter, "No More Giants," William C. Wees provides a historical account of the experimental film community in North America during the 1980s, and the paradigm shift it underwent as a new generation of filmmakers rejected authorial hierarchies and formalist dogmas. In 1989, tensions between the old and new came to a head just before the start of the International Experimental Film Congress held in Toronto. While some younger filmmakers' work appeared in the program, "the overall planning of the congress seemed to favor the [Fred] Camper/[J.] Hoberman view of the supposedly debilitated state of current avant-garde filmmaking" (23). Before the event, younger filmmakers issued an "Open Letter to the Experimental Film Congress," demanding that "the time is long overdue to unwrite the Institutional Canon of Masterworks of the Avant-Garde" and that the work shown at the congress was "chosen to minimize linguistic, sexual, and cultural difference" (24). Seventy-six people signed the "Open Letter," many of them women, and Wees examines the work of three female co-signatories: Leslie Thornton, Su Friedrich, and Abigail Child. Citing these filmmakers as "exemplars of the best avant-garde work of the eighties and after," Wees finds that through their use of mixed forms (combining autobiography, experimental narrative, and collage/montage), and pointed appropriations of pop culture that "more flexible and heterodox measurements of value and relevance [were introduced] into avant-garde filmmaking" (25). Through his incisive analyses of the sights and sounds of Thornton's *Peggy and Fred* cycle (1985–88), Friedrich's *Sink or Swim* (1990), and Child's *Mercy* (1989), Wees mines their complexities. While Child edits her films as an investigation of "how one processes [audiovisual] material" (42), Thornton's experimental narratives operate as "free falls" (26), and Friedrich's as "third-person autobiographies" (32).

Comparable experimental autobiography is thoroughly examined in Kathleen McHugh's contribution, "History and Falsehood in Experimental Autobiographies." After mapping the autobiographical literary tradition by way of readings of Augustine's and Rousseau's confessional texts, and deconstructing the gendered implications of Sitney's "Autobiography in the Avant-Garde Film," McHugh looks to experimental films by women—all fake documentaries—that blend the traditions of cinematic autobiography with identity politics: Lourdes Portillo's *The Devil Never Sleeps* (1994), Cheryl Dunye's *The Watermelon Woman* (1996), and Rea Tajiri's *History and Memory* (1991). In overlapping these traditions, the filmmakers radically transform them, challenging conceptions of fixed identity and using self-representation to question the "truth" of (self-)knowledge and history. McHugh notes that "each filmmaker creates an image for what they cannot find, what is impossible to document, and it is precisely their creation and confession of these false images that expresses the truth of their autobiographies" (126). The paradox is that "stories of what really happened . . . can only be certified by falsehood, simulation, and invention" (ibid.). As women of color, these three filmmakers have been "other" (115) to both the traditions of avant-garde film and women's cinema, yet by taking up their formal and reflexive conventions, each filmmaker images the politics of their absence and the constructedness of history.

The politics of violence figure prominently in two chapters of *Women and Experimental Filmmaking*. Petrolle's analysis of Nina Menkes's *The Bloody Child* (1996) builds a strong case for the efficacy and necessity of postmodern, allegorical filmmaking. A meditation on America's culture of violence where misogyny, war, and murder feed and fold into each other, Menkes's film is ripe for recovery and close

analysis. And Petrolle's piece certainly doesn't disappoint. Maureen Turim's contribution, "The Violence of Desire in Avant-Garde Films," gives an extensive account of the potential reasons for women's experimental film's frequent imaging of female bodies that are either in pain or lashing out to inflict pain. Tracing the appearance of self-inflicted/perpetrated violence by women in films from Germaine Dulac, Maya Deren, Abigail Child, Yvonne Rainer, Sue Friedrich, and in the performance art of Marina Abramovic, Turim probes these filmmaker–artists' audiovisual expressions of physical and metaphorical cuts and wounds, and their "request(s) for healing suture" (90). Turim carefully and evocatively tackles a pervasive theme in women's experimental work (her essay prompted me to reappraise work that she does not discuss, including Yoko Ono's *Cut Piece* [1965], Ana Mendieta's short films, and Patty Chang's video performance art).

Gwendolyn Audrey Foster's contribution, "Experiments in Ethnography," analyzes the representation of women's bodies in Safi Faye's *Selbe* (1983) and Trinh T. Minh-ha's *Reassemblage* (1982) and their facilitation of "haptic learning" and visceral identification, finding that both "renew the ability of documentary form to induce a productive identification between viewer and subject" (181). Building from Deleuze's work on gesture and Benjamin's writings on the ritual nature of art, Foster establishes a persuasive mode in which to understand the embodiments these films condition between the on- and off-screen. Yet her arguments are similar to those set out by Laura U. Marks in her books on haptic cinema and visuality, *The Skin of the Film* (Duke University Press, 2000) and *Touch* (University of Minnesota Press, 2002). Had Foster engaged with Marks's work, the interest and significance of her contribution here would be heightened. However, the sensuality of women's experimental cinema is further explored in two of the volume's strongest contributions: Lucy Fischer's piece on Sally Potter's *The Tango Lesson* (1997), and Scott MacDonald's "Avant-Gardens," a chapter from his book *The Garden in the Machine* (University of California Press, 2001).

Overall, Petrolle and Wexman's collection is an invaluable addition to the literature on women's experimental filmmaking. It is also a substantial reference resource, featuring in addition to its essays a brief history of women's involvement in experimental film, biographies of its featured filmmakers, a distributor contact information section, and a filmography of sixty-four female experimentalists. © 2007 Alison R. Hoffman

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BOOK DATA Jean Petrolle and Virginia Wright Wexman, *Women and Experimental Filmmaking*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2005. $40.00 cloth; $19.95 paper. 312 pages

THE WORLD

VICTORIA MENG

Edward Yang by John Anderson

The work of Edward Yang, who died in 2007 at the age of fifty-nine, has long been familiar to fans of Chinese-language films. One of the founding members of the New Taiwan Cinema movement during the mid-1980s, Yang established his reputation with internationally acclaimed works including *The Terrorizer* (1986), *A Brighter Summer Day* (1991), and *Yi Yi* (2000). He consistently sets his films in contemporary Taipei, where his characters' struggle to find maturity and meaning is often both paralleled and thwarted by their city's ongoing modernization. Having emigrated to Taiwan from mainland China as an infant with his family, and later studied and worked in computer design for a decade in America, Yang's films are characterized by an unsentimental awareness of Taipei as the site of a composite and increasingly cosmopolitan culture. His narratives and mise-en-scène are affected by his dual role as insider and outsider: sustained wide shots keep characters in scale with the environments that confine and define them; meticulously selected music and props fix the fictional events in historical time. Yang is particularly adept at portraying change—societal and personal—as being inevitable, disillusioning, but ultimately to be savored. Thus to his admirers, John Anderson included, Yang's films seem to strike a rare balance between being introspective and eventful, culturally specific yet humanistically universal.

However, until very recently, Yang has rarely been the sole focus of English-language critical attention. Scholars of Chinese cinema have tended to cite his films and impact in passing, preferring to use the works of Hou Hsiao-hsien and occasionally even Ang Lee as extended case studies to represent the film culture of contemporary Taiwan. Certainly Hou and Lee deserve their respective spotlights. Indeed, given the productive critical discourse they have generated, the fact that other Taiwanese directors have received scant exposure seems puzzling: much of the available literature on Yang is restricted to reviews of individual films. Two recent books offer more representative accounts of Taiwan's contemporary directors: *Island on the Edge: Taiwan New Cinema and After* (Hong Kong University Press, 2005), edited by Chris Berry and Feii Lu; and *Taiwan Film Directors: A Treasure Island* (Columbia University Press, 2005) by Emilie Yueh-yu Yeh and Darrell William Davis. Both books contain valuable sections on Yang, but Anderson's book is the first in English to be devoted to the director. It is appropriate therefore that it

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takes an introductory approach, providing extended and ardent descriptions of Yang's eight films. Given the complexity of their plots, Anderson usefully relates the films' stories and characters, these accounts taking precedence over analysis of stylistic features. He does, however, offer insights into recurring thematic preoccupations, arguing that a key element of Yang's achievement is to have refused to cover up or to make light of historical traumas and social dilemmas.

Edward Yang contains four sections: an overview of Yang and Taiwanese cinema's background; eight chapters each dedicated to one of Yang's films; an interview; and a filmmography, bibliography, and index. Of these, the most substantive and provocative section is Anderson's descriptions and interpretations of Yang's *oeuvre*; in contrast, one finds only summaries of Yang's collaborators and his films' reception. Anderson characterizes Yang as a maverick architect of ideas whose work is most powerful when he departs from conventional expectations. In reference to Yang's breakthrough film, *The Terrorizer*, Anderson writes: "Yang's prize at this point in his career was the realization that he needed to make his own reality . . . He also learned that through the elimination of certain elements—explanation, for instance, or sympathetic characters, or any central viewpoint—he could create the sense of alienation and discord that he wanted" (53). To Anderson, Yang's personal development best illuminates his films' preoccupations with themes such as belonging, capitalism, and globalization.

As might be expected from an author who has been a critic for *Newsday* and the *Los Angeles Times*, Anderson's style is journalistic. He has a knack for using comparisons to make Yang more accessible to serious lay readers who may nonetheless know little about Taiwan or its cinema: "It is hard to think of any major creative artist [other than Yang] who can so comfortably be placed beside the likes of Joyce, Vermeer, or even Woody Allen as someone whose work is so inescapably linked with a specific city" (2). One almost feels as if Anderson were a voluble friend whose opinions always stimulate further conversation. For example, in his analysis of *A Brighter Summer Day*, Anderson incisively outlines the plot's sexist framework: "The boys . . . are seduced by gang life because it offers the same kind of solace Ming [the heroine] is seeking through men. Their recourse is seen as romantic; hers, as the equivalent of prostitution" (59). The hero's indictment of Ming's promiscuity, with which the film seems to sympathize, simultaneously shows understandable ignorance and deadly hypocrisy. Anderson's account of Yang's apparent inattention to a woman's point of view in this otherwise masterful film offers a lively starting point for further discussion. Anderson is also adept at drawing attention to recurring devices in Yang's films: the dialectic relationship between art and life, the peripheral yet ubiquitous presence of American artifacts, the power of chance events, simultaneous cynicism toward and acknowledgment of spiritual succor, distantly authoritative fathers, helplessly selfish mothers, siblings who foil the protagonist's aims, and the symbolic power of names. Through Anderson's lens, even Yang's lesser films acquire cinematic substance.

The book's least satisfactory aspects derive from Anderson's relative unfamiliarity with Taiwanese or Chinese culture and cinema: while a distant viewpoint can be an asset, it nonetheless sometimes impedes criticism. Without alternate grounding, some of Anderson's comparisons between Yang and western masters—including Proust, Faulkner, Renoir, Hitchcock, and Chabrol (30, 80)—can be disorienting. Yang's films encourage autobiographical readings, but Anderson perhaps accepts them too readily. For example, *The Terrorizer* can be seen as a result of Yang's internal struggle with the nature of film as art, and as a reflection of the political preoccupations of the contemporary Taiwanese intelligentsia (see Sung-sheng Yvonne Chang's article in *Island on the Edge*). Indeed, *The Terrorizer* is both a watershed within Yang's career and a typical example of the unconventional narratives that many Taiwanese directors experimented with during the mid-1980s, but Anderson exclusively writes about the former, presumably lacking context to take note of the latter. Occasionally, jarring misinterpretations occur: Anderson, for example, surmises that Yang cast Tsai Chin as the female lead of *Taipei Story* (1985) because she looks ethnically exotic, but a locally informed viewer would recognize Tsai as a popular singer whose casting helped to promote the film's soundtrack. Further, Anderson claims that mainland Chinese sometimes refer to the Tiananmen Square Massacre as the "February 28 Incident," when the common term is actually the "June 4 Incident." This is not a trivial mistake, as the two massacres, which respectively took place in Taiwan, 1947, and Beijing, 1989, ultimately led to divergent government and international responses. Another serious historical error occurs when Anderson calls the Kuomingtang Party "Leninist-derived," since the party's main mission (and its justification for killing more than 10,000 Taiwanese civilians in 1947) was anti-Communism. These contextual problems aside, Anderson's book is groundbreaking and an invitation for further study of Edward Yang. © 2007 Victoria Meng

VICTORIA MENG is a Ph.D. candidate, UCLA Department of Film, Television and Digital Media.

BOOK DATA John Anderson, *Edward Yang*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2005. $35.00 cloth; $16.95 paper. 128 pages.

RICHARD ARMSTRONG

The Encyclopedia of British Film, ed. Brian MacFarlane and Anthony Slide

Saddled with an unenviable position as Hollywood's first export territory, and still smarting from François Truffaut's infamous put-down, few national cinemas have been in more urgent need of the scrupulous definitions of good criticism as British cinema. But this maligned output gets a good accounting here and the plaudits for this useful book hail from industry and critics alike. It covers cinema in Britain from William Friese-Greene to Keira Knightley, aspiring to be, in the words of one contributor, "the first port of call" for anyone wishing to explore British cinema. There are, as with any book of this kind, omissions: British film criticism is patchily served. While big names such as Dilys Powell, C. A. Lejeune, and Penelope Houston are included, influential writers like Derek Malcolm, Margaret Hinxman, and Judith Williamson are not. However, *The Encyclopedia of British Film* is overall a creditable attempt to do justice to a rich history, including its byways—as in good entries on the industry journal *Kinematograph Weekly* and "Flicker Alley," the West End hub of the silent era before Wardour Street became British cinema's main address. Unlike Jim Leach's *British Film* (Cambridge University Press, 2004), MacFarlane and Slide have taken to care to rectify the neglect of certain eras. As Luke McKernan observes in his entry on the recently discovered Edwardian footage of Mitchell and Kenyon, its restoration provides a basis for future research.

The mix of writers attests to the gainful work still required. Backgrounds range from established academics (Charles Barr, Barbara Creed) to less orthodox ones (the late Raymond Durgnat), from industry veterans (editor Teddy Darvas) to archivists (former BFI curator David Meeker). Writing of American expatriate Bernard Vorhaus, a director of superior "quota quickie" B-product during the 1930s, Meeker bemoans "inadequate, largely erroneous entries about him" (729), seeing the exposure of this considerable talent as one by-product of the kind of archeological work being undertaken in the encyclopedia.

In his introduction MacFarlane acknowledges the theatrical and literary biases that have characterized British film culture from Ellen Terry, the nineteenth-century stage diva and founder of the Film Society, that forerunner of the metropolitan art house, to the Harry Potter franchise. The literary bias tends to drive hardcore cinephiles away. For scholars Andrew Spicer, Steve Chibnall, and freelance researcher Linda Wood (good here on quota quickies), it is the under-explored avenues of studio genre output that quicken the pulse. Another writer celebrates Lance Comfort, director of a string of "wicked woman" melodramas in the 1940s. If Hitchcock's American work has attained canonic status, as Robert Murphy observes, the six Gaumont-British thrillers from *The Man Who Knew Too Much* (1934) to *The Lady Vanishes* (1938) have exciting plots, intriguing villains, ambivalent romance, and unostentatious sets, "creating a convincing and resonant world" (329).

Attention to character actors like Mona Washbourne and the ubiquitous Sam Kydd sees British film scholarship here reaching for the comprehensiveness enjoyed by Hollywood studies, although some of the attention to what are undeniably minor subjects can seem overzealous. Even for those who remember Derek Nimmo's parade of 1960s ineffectuals, the accolade "silly ass supreme of the second half of the 20th century" (514) will seem like hyperbole. As in America, the link between a particular genre and a particular studio has at different times been vital to provincial matinee schedules. Hammer horror, Ealing comedy, Gainsborough melodrama: all the entries here usefully direct the reader to the best works in each area. Unlike French or American cinema, both of which have attracted much auteurist analysis, British film history is tent-poled by strong associations between directors and producers. Kevin Gough-Yates's account of the Powell and Pressburger partnership is as sensitive to the subtle interplay of this team as to the "surreal sense of heaven on earth" (562) which inspired their fondest aficionados.

This visionary quality is rare in a cinema shaped by producer Michael Balcon's wartime distinction between "realism" (quality) and "tinsel" (entertainment). The influence of British cinema's literary forebears and a stodgy public-information legacy hangs heavy, while middle-class opinion still baulks before the grindhouse doors. Re-evaluation is taking place throughout this book, yet the awards appendix feels like an attempt at cheerleading British talent—an endeavor which, as these smartly written entries attest, the book does not need. Two complementary aspects of this impressive book are especially welcome. On the one hand, the classical decades are mined for the careers and cycles that have escaped the scrutiny of official histories. On the other, the verve of modernist iconoclasm animates entries on Derek Jarman, Sally Potter, and Nicolas Roeg. British cinema scholarship is moving beyond the mantras and put-downs of the past. © 2007 Richard Armstrong

RICHARD ARMSTRONG is co-author of *The Rough Guide to Film* (2007).

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LINDY LEONG

Rethinking Third Cinema, ed. Anthony R. Guneratne and Wimal Dissanayake

Third (World) Cinema aesthetics and the malignly romanticized tri-continental "cinemas of revolution" in the 1960s and 70s, argue the editors of *Rethinking Third Cinema*, remain misunderstood. The explosion of a collective political consciousness and its expression through cinematic praxis is often discussed as a creative flowering from long-dormant roots. Yet the revolutionary Third Cinema lost its volatile fervor and immediacy in both popular and academic discourses. In this collection of essays, the contributors undertake a kind of postmortem on the these cinemas of so-called "non-industrialized" or, to use an older pejorative term, "underdeveloped" countries. The contributors vigorously revisit and interrogate the psychological shame and scars of the colonialist project at Third Cinema's heart in order to locate its complex legacy for both indigenous and international audiences. Serving and reacting to the exigencies of the political zeitgeist, Third Cinema practitioners (and their forebears) envisioned the camera as a weapon for safeguarding the oppressed and disenfranchised. Placing their faith in the image's unique power to "bomb the system," these activist artists created works imbued with personal voices of suffering and transcendence, and politicized echoes of martyrdom and divine celebration.

Guneratne's introduction proposes a revisionary examination of the pioneering theoretical claims of Solanas, Getino, and Espinosa in search of "a clearer understanding of the legitimacy of Third Cinema theory as theory, but also a richer appreciation of its limitations" (2). He goes on to outline the main trends in Western scholarship, notably the work of Teshome Gabriel, Paul Willemen, Ella Shohat, and Robert Stam (the last two of whom are contributors to the collection). Guneratne emphasizes "the interactions between varying forms of First, Second and Third Cinema," "the teeming sub-national cinemas of such extended 'nations,'" and the "various amalgams of First, Second and Third Cinema" as exemplified particularly in the case of India (20). These matters problematize the "conceptual division of local/regional/national" (ibid.) expounded by pioneering Third Cinema theorists. Gabriel's *Third World Filmmaking in the Third World* (UMI Research Press, 1982), Jim Pines and Willemen's key anthology *Questions of Third Cinema* (BFI Publishing, 1990), and Roy Armes's *Third World Filmmaking and the West* (University of California Press, 1992) are the seminal books whose relevance, according to Guneratne, is now waning. Rather than being an introduction to the topic (and readers new to the area may find the book challenging), this relatively modest anthology of nine essays aims to reconfigure debates in the light of contemporary thinking.

The first two sections on "Third Cinema theory and beyond" and "Challenging Third World legacies: Issues of gender, culture, and representation" include reprints of Robert Stam and Ella Shohat's pioneering postmodernist and cultural studies-based work on the aesthetics of hybridity, and on gender and the construction of the nation. Since Stam and Shohat's *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media* (Routledge, 1994) covers similar terrain, there is not much more offered here than is to be found more fully developed in their book. Wonderfully provocative and dense, Sumita Chakravarty's meditation on "the erotics of history" and new Asian cinemas recuperates a robust "comparative framework" of Third (World) historiography in her imaginative deployment of the postmodernist theories of Georges Bataille and Salman Rushdie. She reinvigorates Bataille's demarcation of the "domain of eroticism" as the "domain of violence, of violation" (82–83), and Rushdie's historical recollection of an imaginary homeland where woman stands as site of a demoralized national body, in her succinct discussion of female transgression as transcendence.

The third section, "Alternative cinemas in the age of globalization," features two solid industry histories of cinematic aesthetics and reception in Latin America and Africa by Marvin D'Lugo and N. Frank Ukadike. D'Lugo's contribution combines issues of (re)mapping and (re)framing national cinematic borders as these have been formulated by New Latin American scholars Michael Chanan and Zuzana Pick. He posits that these self-generated, often "melodramatic" images become a form of cultural empowerment because they "create an internal distance for national audiences that enable spectators to see their own culture from a position of renewed critical distance" (114). Ukadike's account of the emergence and influence of video films in Anglophone Africa charts a burgeoning phenomenon that has received little attention. He characterizes Francophone African cinema as preoccupied with finding a distinctive style of expression which actually comes off as extremely didactic and alienating to local cultures. He contrasts this with the development in Ghana and Nigeria of original Anglophone works that exemplify a more personalized, intimate form, playing to the strengths and traditions of African theater and music. The strong and realistic narratives, and greater accessibility of format of these works, have encouraged a diverse slate of filmmakers, including women, to produce them. The integrity of these video films makes them a vital contribution to the future full realization of a pan-African cinematic discourse.

The fourth section, "The relocation of culture: social specificity and the 'Third' question," is comprised of two eloquent and informative cross-examinations of Indonesian and Chinese cinemas by Krishna Sen and Rey Chow. Sen interrogates the "paradigm of Third Cinema" (147) in the light of the political zeitgeist within Indonesia of the 1960s to the present, and tests the applicability of Third Cinema theory to practice. She describes the work of Lekra, the cultural mass organization which served as the mouthpiece for the Indonesian Communist Party. Lekra's spiritual leader, Bachtiar Siagian, happens to also be a film director and theorist. Combined with the Sukarno regime's state support of the Left, Lekra's efforts complicate the accuracy of classifying Indonesian Cinema as belonging to an established "notion of the Third World" (151). Chow's metaphorical engagement with the poetics of seduction and homecoming in Chen Kaige's *Temptress Moon* (1996) deploys psychoanalytic film analysis to read a text grappling with a specific sense of place and authenticity (both historical and fictional). She employs her understanding of Chinese visual culture and gaze theory (the look and its return) to comment powerfully on a psychohistorical displacement from one's own home and self. Her mapping of women's bodies as topography—where the male spectator (in the film's story, the professional gigolo Zhongliang) filters the intertwined experience of pleasure and trauma in the construction of a cultural and personal memory—interrogates and reconciles provocative and original thoughts on the psychology of the postcolonial and immigrant.

The final section, "Receiving/retrieving Third (World) Cinema: Alternative approaches to spectator studies and critical history" boasts important contributions by Hamid Naficy and Wimal Dissanayake. Naficy's account of "transnational spectatorship of films by Third World populations in film festivals" (188–89) and his autobiographical observations on watching films in Iran and the reactions of Iranian audiences exhibit the author's characteristic cross-cultural sensibility and humor. He points to the multiple intertextualities created in dubbing, voiceovers, and interpreter roles played by "curtain reciters or readers (*pardeh khan*)" and "student translators" of foreign films in Iranian movie theaters (191). His informed observations elucidate the dynamic reception strategies at work marking these Third World spectators not just as consumers but as producers of meaning. Dissanayake's essay convincingly recuperates popular Indian cinema as legitimate object of serious academic scholarship through an archeology of its origins in various strains of traditional and region-based Indian theater. Cinema as forum of culture and politics occupies a central role in India's negotiation with cultural modernity and therefore, as an "intersection of diverse contemporary discursivities" (211), presents a vexed space where "creative ambiguities and tensions" exist, and puts forth "new scopic regimes" (219). In all, this collection is a step forward in renewing debates around Third Cinema. © 2007 Lindy Leong

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HORROR AND SCIENCE FICTION

DIANE WALDMAN

Screening the Gothic by Lisa Hopkins

The Gothic genre, with its haunted mansions, imperiled heroines, sinister masculine figures, and unexplained events continues to fascinate literary and media critics alike. Lisa Hopkins's *Screening the Gothic*, which examines what happens when the literary Gothic is adapted for film or television, is an interesting recent contribution to this body of work. But because Hopkins deals almost exclusively with media versions of canonical literary texts, it has a shadow subject, adaptation. Here a series of largely unexamined assumptions make its contribution more problematic.

Hopkins begins by noting the specific body of writing produced in England between 1750 and 1820 to which the term Gothic was originally applied and by defining the Gothic in terms of setting ("ancient, partially ruined castles or mansions haunted by the real or apparent threat of a supernatural presence"), character ("a mysterious and threatening older man, a vulnerable heroine, and a character who is posed ambiguously between good and evil"), theme ("a concern with the fragmented and often doubled nature of the self"), and mood ("a concentration on the gloomy, the mysterious, and the ruined" [xi]). Her thesis is a bold one: as she argues in her introduction, her claim is that "paradoxically, those [literary] texts whose affiliations with the Gothic were originally the clearest become the least Gothic when they are filmed" (xiii) and vice versa, that works consciously written in opposition to the Gothic movement often become "Gothicized" in their screen adaptation. Hopkins argues that certain ontological or epistemological characteristics of the cinematic medium ("cinema's focus on the face . . . inevitably leads to an emphasis on the individual rather than the group, while its traditional language of visual symbolism causes things to be read

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in terms other than their own" [ibid.]) produce a modal affinity with the Gothic; one would expect, then, that it would be particularly suited for adapting works in this genre. However, Hopkins claims further that "for a [literary] text which has already pre-empted these preferred filmic strategies by being obviously Gothic in the first place, other approaches become necessary, leading to an overcompensatory emphasis on backstory and consequences, since the psychologizing is felt to be already performed" (xiii–xiv). The effect is that "the Gothic logic of the original narrative becomes submerged under details and additions which often distract from the pattern of the original rather than complementing it" (xiv). Similarly, in her conclusion, Hopkins argues that it is the nature of the original literary text itself that determines the extent of the adaptation's Gothic qualities (148).

Hopkins attempts to defend this thesis through a series of skillful close readings. The book is organized both chronologically and conceptually: chronologically, because it begins with the analysis of three recent screen adaptations of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (1990, 1996, 2000), a text which predates the Gothic proper, and ends with a discussion of three 2001 films which she argues "deploy distinctively Gothicizing techniques" (116): *The Mummy Returns*, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, and *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring*; conceptually, because the three middle chapters group texts according to the adaptations' relationship to their original source material—putting the Gothic in where it does not belong, taking it out when it should stay in, or inflecting it differently. Thus chapter two treats four screen adaptations that, through techniques that emphasize dreams and doubling, Gothicize four literary texts (*Clarissa* [1991], *Sense and Sensibility* [1995], *Mansfield Park* [1999], and *The Time Machine* [2002]) whose philosophical assumptions about stable personality or rationality place them in opposition to the Gothic movement. Chapter three deals conversely with those (*'Tis Pity She's a Whore* [1971], *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein* [1994], *The Woman in White* [1997], *Lady Audley's Secret* [2000]) which, by emphasizing scientific or social explanations over supernatural or psychological ones, de-Gothicize the firmly Gothic originals, and chapter four with adaptations of Gothic texts (*Jane Eyre* [1995, 1997] and *Dracula* [1992]) which deploy Gothic techniques qualitatively different from those of the original novels.

Hopkins is a clever and persuasive close reader, sensitive to the specificity of each medium, and she is especially good at analyzing the philosophical implications or ideological effects of particular additions, deletions, or changes to the original literary texts in the adaptations. Similarly, she is good at historicizing many of these changes, for example when she places the strong interest in representing childhood and its perspectives or softening the character of Rochester in Franco Zefferelli's 1995 version of *Jane Eyre* in the context of contemporary concerns about child and domestic abuse (93–95), or when she argues, based on an essay by Kristin Flieger Samuelson, that the changes to the character of Margaret in the same year's Ang Lee–Emma Thompson version of *Sense and Sensibility* offer "a genuinely alternative and indeed revolutionary perspective . . . suggesting that patriarchy can be effectively challenged, in ways that Austen herself does not conceive" (39).

IN THE NEXT ISSUE

The DVD release of
Jean-Luc Godard's
Histoire(s) du Cinéma

However, I think that Hopkins runs into trouble when she attempts to derive an abstract or theoretical principle from her specific analyses, as she does in her introduction and conclusion. For example, after 150 pages of convincing historical and textual analysis, it is stunning to arrive at her conclusion that "the presence or absence of the Gothic on screen is not, in fact, a matter of chronology or even of historical moment," nor "is its presence or absence the result of the preferences of particular directors"; "[i]nstead the extent of a film's Gothic qualities seems . . . to be a product of the original nature of the text being adapted" (148). Not only does this grant an inordinate amount of power to the source material, rob screen adapters of agency, and deny the impact of historical factors and processes which might affect particular screen adaptations, but it flies in the face of much of what has come before. For example, if "the extent of a film's Gothic qualities seems . . . to be a product of the original nature of the text being adopted," how does it explain the differences in approach to the Gothic among the three roughly contemporaneous versions of *Hamlet* or among the various versions of *Jane Eyre* Hopkins had previously argued for so well?

Perhaps this seeming inconsistency or contradiction is due to Hopkins's allegiance to or primary concern with "what happens to" the literary source material, rather than "what happens in" the screen adaptation, a symptom of which is her need, for example, to justify the inclusion of the 1633 John Ford play *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* in the Gothic literary canon but no need to justify the inclusion

of the film adaptation in what is otherwise a book about 1990s and 2000s screen adaptations. Related to this is Hopkins's insufficient theorization of the purpose of an adaptation or of the role of the critic of adaptations. At times she is concerned with assessing the philosophical implications or ideological effects of the changes she analyzes and accounting for them historically. This seems to me a more contemporary understanding of a screen adaptation as a particular reading of an older literary text, and of the role of the critic as one who attempts to explain or account for the specificity of that reading. But at other times she seems more concerned with assessing whether an adaptation is good or bad, successful or a flawed, based upon more traditional notions of an adaptation's "fidelity" or "faithfulness" to its original source material (or in this case more specifically, its degree of "Gothicness") and the critic as one who polices that fidelity. So, for example, in her discussion of Kenneth Branagh's *Hamlet*, Simon Wells's *The Time Machine*, or the ITV version of *Jane Eyre*, pointing out what's bad or wrong with the adaptation wars with and at times overshadows the discussion of how specific changes from the original function and why. At any rate, it would have been useful for Hopkins to spell out her assumptions about adaptation and the purpose of adaptation analysis initially.

Screening the Gothic is a well-written, well-argued book, contributing much to our understanding of specific screen texts and their relationship to their source material. However, in some ways, the focus on more or less contemporary adaptations of canonical literary texts limits what can be said about the screen Gothic (for example, other than a brief allusion to the 1943 George Stephenson *Jane Eyre*, there is no reference to the 1940s "gaslight genre," "gothic paranoid films," or "gothic romance films," written about by, among others, Tania Modleski, Mary Ann Doane, and myself, nor is there any engagement with this earlier feminist writing on the screen Gothic). Furthermore, the focus on the "Gothicness" or "anti-Gothicness" of the screen versions limits what can be said about screen adaptation. *Screening the Gothic* reveals both the problems and the promise of studies of adaptation as they are presently being conceptualized. © 2007 Diane Waldman

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JANANI SUBRAMANIAN

American Science Fiction TV: Star Trek, Stargate, and Beyond by Jan Johnson-Smith

Excepting high-profile shows like *Star Trek*, *The X-Files*, and *The Twilight Zone*, science-fiction television is something of a blind spot in film and television studies. This book is an effort to rectify that: Johnson-Smith turns a scholarly eye toward science-fiction television of the past two decades, focusing not on themes but in particular on how televisuality and new types of technology interact with an older mythology of science fiction. Her first chapter tackles the vexatious area of genre theory. A pragmatic approach is taken: rather than attempting to delineate the limits or boundaries of science fiction, Johnson-Smith instead locates the genre within the larger binary of realism/formalism. As she puts it, having discussed theorists such as Christian Metz and Darko Suvin, "not only must the world be plausible, but a strong degree of estrangement from the mundane world is also vital" (20). Isolating science fiction's constant tension between immersion and estrangement allows Johnson-Smith to introduce the unique, medium-specific qualities of science-fiction television and film, where the visual element, rather than narrative, becomes crucial in conveying messages and addressing the viewer. In chapter 2, "Histories," Johnson-Smith emphasizes connections between science fiction's historical roots and its presence on television, pairing a discussion of literary theory and philosophy with an overview of television as a medium. Particularly compelling is the author's comparison between science fiction and the Western: both genres reimagine space and place, invoke myths of discovery and national consciousness, and involve the imaginative use of visual imagery. The theme of the mastery of nature recurs in both genres: "In American science fiction, 'nature' is replaced with the universe, but the remainder of the relationship is the same" (48). Johnson-Smith alludes to the fact that film and television representations of both the West and space frontiers depend largely on Cold War ideologies, the Vietnam War, the Space Race, and so the relationship in general between the media and political discourses.

Johnson-Smith's transition to questions that are specific to television is brisk, but it opens up crucial issues. She makes compelling connections between John Caldwell's theory of televisuality, television's status as a pulp, low-culture medium, and science fiction's adaptability to the small screen. The development in 1980s television, according

of the film adaptation in what is otherwise a book about 1990s and 2000s screen adaptations. Related to this is Hopkins's insufficient theorization of the purpose of an adaptation or of the role of the critic of adaptations. At times she is concerned with assessing the philosophical implications or ideological effects of the changes she analyzes and accounting for them historically. This seems to me a more contemporary understanding of a screen adaptation as a particular reading of an older literary text, and of the role of the critic as one who attempts to explain or account for the specificity of that reading. But at other times she seems more concerned with assessing whether an adaptation is good or bad, successful or a flawed, based upon more traditional notions of an adaptation's "fidelity" or "faithfulness" to its original source material (or in this case more specifically, its degree of "Gothicness") and the critic as one who polices that fidelity. So, for example, in her discussion of Kenneth Branagh's *Hamlet*, Simon Wells's *The Time Machine*, or the ITV version of *Jane Eyre*, pointing out what's bad or wrong with the adaptation wars with and at times overshadows the discussion of how specific changes from the original function and why. At any rate, it would have been useful for Hopkins to spell out her assumptions about adaptation and the purpose of adaptation analysis initially.

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Excepting high-profile shows like *Star Trek*, *The X-Files*, and *The Twilight Zone*, science-fiction television is something of a blind spot in film and television studies. This book is an effort to rectify that: Johnson-Smith turns a scholarly eye toward science-fiction television of the past two decades, focusing not on themes but in particular on how televisuality and new types of technology interact with an older mythology of science fiction. Her first chapter tackles the vexatious area of genre theory. A pragmatic approach is taken: rather than attempting to delineate the limits or boundaries of science fiction, Johnson-Smith instead locates the genre within the larger binary of realism/formalism. As she puts it, having discussed theorists such as Christian Metz and Darko Suvin, "not only must the world be plausible, but a strong degree of estrangement from the mundane world is also vital" (20). Isolating science fiction's constant tension between immersion and estrangement allows Johnson-Smith to introduce the unique, medium-specific qualities of science-fiction television and film, where the visual element, rather than narrative, becomes crucial in conveying messages and addressing the viewer. In chapter 2, "Histories," Johnson-Smith emphasizes connections between science fiction's historical roots and its presence on television, pairing a discussion of literary theory and philosophy with an overview of television as a medium. Particularly compelling is the author's comparison between science fiction and the Western: both genres reimagine space and place, invoke myths of discovery and national consciousness, and involve the imaginative use of visual imagery. The theme of the mastery of nature recurs in both genres: "In American science fiction, 'nature' is replaced with the universe, but the remainder of the relationship is the same" (48). Johnson-Smith alludes to the fact that film and television representations of both the West and space frontiers depend largely on Cold War ideologies, the Vietnam War, the Space Race, and so the relationship in general between the media and political discourses.

Johnson-Smith's transition to questions that are specific to television is brisk, but it opens up crucial issues. She makes compelling connections between John Caldwell's theory of televisuality, television's status as a pulp, low-culture medium, and science fiction's adaptability to the small screen. The development in 1980s television, according

to Caldwell, of style over substance, and the cultivation of boutique and quality television in many ways enabled science-fiction shows to not only appear on network television, but also become critically and popularly lauded. Johnson-Smith's argument about the low-culture position of both television and science fiction relates to other points the author makes about television's inherently domestic, mundane nature: "The expansion of television to a twenty-four hour multi-channel flood has created a potential monotony in the experience of viewing" (63). When science fiction became more stylized in the 1980s (with shows like *Amazing Stories*, *Beauty and the Beast*, and *Out of this World*), it started to challenge and change the status of both the genre and the medium, interrupting television's penchant for repetition and continuity, and demanding more of its viewer's attention and consideration. Johnson-Smith speculates on the radical nature of science-fiction television, focusing on the fact that the constant introduction of new worlds and fantastic imagery may immunize the viewer to the genre's innovative potential: "The exotic becomes insipid, mundane—the very antithesis of science fiction" (70).

Having pursued these broad questions, Johnson-Smith goes on to look at some case studies, both canonical and under-studied, dwelling on four shows (*Star Trek*, *Farscape*, *Space: Above and Beyond*, and *Babylon* 5) that epitomize the narrative and visual complexities that science fiction brings to television. For example, in the chapter on *Star Trek*, "Yesterday's Enterprise," Johnson-Smith performs a formalist analysis of the intricate language, imagery, and narrative of the various manifestations of the series, and their representations of race and gender. Though *Star Trek*'s innovations in representation, especially its use of alien metaphors and fantastic microcosms, have been discussed extensively by other writers, Johnson-Smith offers significant new insight, as when he argues that the entire *Star Trek* universe has developed in a disappointingly conservative direction, suggesting "an underlying ideological anachronism" (116). In the next chapter of the book, "Wormhole X-treme!: Images of Time and Space," Johnson-Smith explores how the idea of a "wormhole" is used in science-fiction series such as *Farscape* and *Stargate SG-1*. A useful narrative device, the wormhole concept allows for all kinds of manipulations of history and geography: "While physicists study space from the 'big bang' to the curvature of time, it is also natural for sf to speculate upon the concept of going forward or backward in time in order to explore, change things or, in the case of history, most commonly to ensure that events remain as they originally took place" (156–57). A complex narrative device like this is an example of the kind of postmodern, self-reflexive play on existing science-fiction codes that Johnson-Smith argues is a crucial form of innovation in the genre—an alternative to CGI and other special effects which very quickly seem dated and uninteresting to viewers.

The sophistication of contemporary science-fiction television becomes apparent in the two other series Johnson-Smith focuses on, *Space: Above and Beyond* and *Babylon 5*. In chapter 4, "The Sacrifice of Angels," the author uses the former as an example of a science-fiction series that challenges post-Vietnam military ideology and mythology with a focus on humanity and community. After introducing a brief history of military themes and imagery in both film and television, Johnson-Smith concentrates on *Space*'s main protagonist, Lt. Col. T. C. McQueen (James Morrison), and how his characterization as an everyman, humble and committed to a greater cause, challenges the American mythology of the soldier as superhero and savior. In the same vein, *Babylon 5*, which is discussed in the last chapter of *American Science Fiction TV*, often challenged the aesthetics and ideology of American television; Johnson-Smith's close textual analysis pays justified attention to a series that consistently and overtly confronted the status quo of both American society and American television. The show, based on a space station located in neutral space territory, employs a complex narrative structure that is both episodic and serial, often leading to more questions than answers, and in the process deals in sophisticated ways with problems of leadership, race relations, the urban space, and history. In its utopian leanings, complex narratives, and dynamic use of visuals and sound, the five-season show consistently foregrounded the science-fiction trope of "cognitive estrangement," a remarkable feat given the conservatism of network television: "*Babylon 5* requires much the same degree of thought and attention externally, from its viewers, as it requires internally, from its characters, a risky, innovative strategy" (193). In her analysis of the show, Johnson-Smith displays both scholarly rigor and the enthusiasm of a fan with a love of detail. *American Science Fiction TV* is accordingly lively as well as a corrective to the neglect in academic circles of serious discussion of science fiction and television. © 2007 Janani Subramanian

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BOOK DATA Jan Johnson-Smith, *American Science Fiction TV: Star Trek, Stargate, and Beyond*. New Yorl: I.B. Tauris, 2005. $24.95 paper. 320 pages.

DONALD F. LARSSON

Bad: Infamy, Darkness, Evil, and Slime on Screen, ed. Murray Pomerance

The scope of this collection of original essays is so evident from its subtitle that one hardly knows where to begin, a point that editor and contributor Murray Pomerance readily concedes. Yet, Pomerance remarks in his spirited introductory essay, the book's project—conceived before September 11, 2001—is to respond to an epistemic shift in cinema, "an unheralded new *topos* where . . . infamy, darkness, evil, and slime resided casually and everywhere as the stuff of the everyday" (1). For the last thirty years, he claims, we have encountered in movies "a vision of conflict and decay that had heretofore been scarcely imaginable in such detail, suggested and implied rather than directly shown" (3). Pomerance sketches out some reasons for that transformation: the need of producers to "pre-sell" their films to international markets, the emergence of new film technologies of "hideousness and slime," and the ideological drives to view "evil" as a violation of a natural and harmonious social order and to promote "undesirable but safe activity" as "thrillingly marginal" so that truly dangerous activity "can be cast in shadow" (6). However, Pomerance warns, "Much is denied by seeing film evil and ugliness *only* as ideological," which "blinds us to [our own subjective] desire" to view the darkness (8).

The essays, many by major figures in current Film Studies, are loosely organized within three sections. The authors in part one, "It's a Slimy World, After All" (Tom Gunning, Gwendolyn Audrey Foster, Aaron Baker, Christopher Sharrett, Peter Lehman, Kirby Farell, and Henry A. Giroux), deal with cinematic evil as a manifestation of larger cultural and technical contexts. In part two, "Auteurs of Negativity, Icons of Darkness," Wheeler Winston Dixon, Kristen Hatch, Tony Williams, Steven Woodward, Gina Marchetti, Dana Polan, and William Rothman consider how individual actors, directors (and their films), or character types represent cinematic "badness" in one way or another. The authors of part three, "The Charisma of Villainy" (Alexander Doty and Patricia Clare Ingham, E. Ann Kaplan, Lester D. Friedman, Cynthia Fuchs, Rebecca Bell-Mereau, Ina Rae Hark, and Pomerance) examine evil or badness as represented through the distorting lenses of gender identity, age, and class, and consider the allure of film Nazis, "mad" scientists, and—yes—slime. The final piece is Pomerance's own verbally dazzling appreciation of Anthony Minghella's *The Talented Mr. Ripley* (1999).

It doesn't really matter that the associations among these essays are tenuous, linked less by common themes than by the proximity of their pages. The book is what Pomerance calls "a sketch . . . of the range of badness" that attempts "to give some hints as to where screen evil came from and how it functions as a staple of our film diet today" (2). Needless to say, though, some essays provide better sketches and hints than others, even though all are relatively short and highly readable.

Gunning's "Flickers: On Cinema's Power for Evil," interrogates the fear of film itself as a medium "capable of evil," in the words of the 1915 Supreme Court decision that denied First Amendment protection to this young medium as a form of speech or expression (22). Gunning examines the cultural and rhetorical contexts of that decision but also connects it to leftist critiques of the cinematic apparatus as an instrument of ideology that would emerge six decades later. This richly allusive essay links both "conservative" and "radical" fears of the medium to the development over the past two centuries of technologies of illusion (29) smacking of the tricks of the carnival mountebank on the one hand (31), and suggesting a metaphysical incarnation of Evil on the other. Ultimately, Gunning suggests, these fears reveal "a modern conception of evil: a power exceeding and possibly overwhelming reason" (35).

Gunning's essay aside, the more successful contributions focus on individual films, people, or genres, a reflection of the relative brevity of these pieces. Some of the essays implicitly take up Gunning's point, questioning film's supposed near-hypnotic force by addressing how the "badness" of their subjects extends beyond the screen's frame. Thus, in "'How Will I Get My Opium?': Jean Cocteau and the Treachery of Friendship," Wheeler Winston Dixon examines the artist's life and career, seeking beauty within his sometimes beastly behavior, and finding his life "a reminder of our mendacity, our human complexity, and our ongoing potential for both harm and good" (140). Similarly, in "Wanted for Murder: The Strange Case of Eric Portman," Tony Williams examines how the British actor's sometimes-destructive characters related to his own self-destructive personality, both indices of the repressive British culture of the post-war years. One of the most interesting essays is Dana Polan's "On the Bad Goodness of *Born to Be Bad*: Auteurism, Evaluation, and Nicholas Ray's Outsider Cinema." Polan notes how auteur criticism inverted established evaluative norms of aesthetically "good" and "bad" films. What then is a "bad" auteur film? Polan seeks an answer by looking at Nicholas Ray's 1950 film, which is not "good" by auteurist (or other) standards but which is nonetheless "instructive." The film's failure high-

lights the question of "why we need to evaluate in the first place," since films find their value (in another echo of Gunning) "only within a user community that takes for itself the right to judge and to decide cinematic fate" (211).

Other essays, despite their own useful and varied strengths, may take some films' "user communities" too much for granted. One can agree with Gwendolyn Audrey Foster in "Monstrosity and the Bad-White-Body Film" that the 1972 exploitation film *The Thing with Two Heads* (in which Ray Milland and Roosevelt Grier fight for domination of their shared body) "renders cultural diversity as dystopian" (50). But is the film as "transgressive" as Foster claims, or does it reflect white liberal unease with the rhetoric of black power and separatism that had so strongly altered public views of race relations by that year? Some essays have a hermetic quality due to the concentration on the film to the exclusion of its varied communities. Henry A. Giroux's examination of Terry Zwigoff's *Ghost World* (2001) mostly bypasses the "user community" of readers of Daniel Clowes's original "underground comic" (not to mention other works by Clowes, Chris Ware, and others) and specifically defines students (high school? college?) as audience for a politicized pedagogy. Rebecca Bell-Mettereau's essay has my favorite title—"Searching for Blobby Fissures: Slime, Sexuality, and the Grotesque"—yet when she claims that after *The Sixth Sense* in 1999, "Audiences seemed to lose their fascination with gross and slimy fare," I turn in wonder to my television listings, featuring yet another season of *C.S.I.* and its many spin-offs and variants, not to mention such cable fare as HBO's *Deadwood*, with its dung-laden streets, infected prostitutes, and Mr. Wu's pigs.

Two final quibbles. First: the 35mm frame enlargments used to illustrate most of the essays are not reproduced well, so that their usefulness and impact are blunted. (Compare the crisp studio shot of Chaplin as the Great Dictator that precedes Lester A. Friedman's "Darkness Visible: Images of Nazis in American Films.") Second: even though the cover features a wonderful shot of Dennis Hopper's glaring eyes, the actor—an iconic embodiment of evil ever since *Blue Velvet* (1986)—is mentioned only in passing in the book. If not a catalog, taxonomy, or even an *Idiot's Guide* to "badness" in movies, *Bad* is good, offering much to consider in how and why we watch the bad, the evil, and the slimy. © 2007 Donald F. Larsson

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MYTHS, MOTHERS, AND MONOLITHS

National identity is predicated, in part, on the intentional forgetting or remembering of historical events, and cinema plays a role in these processes. In *The Afterlife of America's War in Vietnam*, Gordon Arnold traces the many incarnations of the war in American popular culture, deftly demonstrating that retellings of the conflict are often intertwined with political rhetoric. By the end of the 1970s, films like *The Deerhunter* (1978) and *Apocalypse Now* (1979) chronicled the psychological damage to Americans, with Vietnamese providing only "atmosphere" in the background. Ronald Reagan's rehabilitation of the war as a noble and just cause paralleled changing media representations of the Vietnam veteran in the 80s, including Tom Selleck's portrayal of dashing private investigator Thomas Magnum, and the muscle-bound figure of John Rambo, whose triumphant, cinematic return to Vietnam in *Rambo: First Blood Part II* (1985) proved cathartic to audiences who reveled in the film's revisionist history. In his chapter on the echoes of Vietnam in a post-September 11 world, Arnold shows how recent political and historical events shape audience reception of contemporary films about Vietnam. For example, Randall Wallace's dramatization of the Battle of Ia Drang in *We Were Soldiers* (2002), released only months after the beginning of the Afghanistan War, reminded viewers that American interventions in foreign lands come at a high price, often yielding unintended and unexpected consequences.

War and history have traditionally been thoroughly masculine affairs. Through a gendering of Freud's ideas in *History Films, Women, and Freud's Uncanny*, Susan E. Linville sets out to recover the feminine in contemporary films about America's past. She argues that the uncanny creates "anxieties about identity boundaries, including the division between past and present, living and dead, and self and (m)other" (16); Linville's feminist analysis of history films performs a similar function, threatening to disrupt our perception of the mythologies that inform our national identity. Women have traditionally been exalted as symbols of home and the nation and the recent spate of World War II films reinforces this positioning of women. For example, Steven Spielberg's *Saving Private Ryan* (1998) invents, according to Linville, a nostalgic, multilayered longing for "womb, mother, home, rural heartland, and America—the beautiful (mother) marshaled as an aesthetic counterweight to, and simultaneous justification for, the grim battle abroad" (44). This reductive mythologization of women as mere nurturing maternal bosoms contrasts with the monstrous femininity in Oliver Stone's *Nixon* (1995), where the president's puritanical mother is represented as the cause of his tortured paranoia and by implication the failures of the nation during her son's administration. Linville argues that John Sayles's *Lone Star* (1996) and *Limbo* (1999) provide less pejorative constructions of women, especially in the use of a "daughter-storyteller to represent and call into question the multiple borders that shape national and state identities" (118).

Screening Politics: The Politician in American Movies is of topical interest. In it, Harry Keyishian discusses how films help to shape our understanding of the American political process. He shows how the populist films of the Depression era, with their endorsement of the progressive ideals of Roosevelt's New Deal, gave way to a generally more ambiguous view of politics and politicians after World War II. Many recent films take a cynical look at the corrupting influences on American politics: big money and ideological extremism in Tim Robbins's *Bob Roberts* (1992), or the compromising of personal values in the world of political fundraising and special interests in Herbert Ross's *True Colors* (1991) and Warren Beatty's *Bulworth* (1998). However, Keyishian points out that despite the cynicism of the post-Watergate era, or perhaps precisely because of it, the redeemer hero of the 1930s has returned; fictional presidents in Ivan Reitman's *Dave* (1993) and Rob Reiner's *The American President* (1995) save a flawed, but fundamentally just, political system through their combination of personal integrity and pragmatism.

Just as American scholars have interrogated American identity, history, and memory through film, Anne Jäckel in *European Film Industries* addresses Europe's struggles to protect cultural identity. It's an age-old problem: how can Europe compete with a Hollywood machine that has monopolized production, distribution, and exhibition since the end of World War I? Jäckel offers an interesting overview of the current state of European film, supplementing her study with numerous tables, statistics, and illustrative case studies. She documents the national, supranational, and global strategies designed to increase European films' visibility and profit-earning potential. Critics of national film subsidies and quotas claim the

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system encourages a continuation of the European art-cinema tradition, which has no commercial appeal to a European audience weaned on American blockbusters and action films. Recent funding and marketing strategies on the part of the European Union, however, have also garnered criticism for overemphasizing profit. Jäckel shows how mergers and collaborations with major U.S. players have enabled many European filmmakers to penetrate markets otherwise off limits. For example, in 1998, Miramax signed an exclusive agreement with the German collective X Filme for distribution rights to the group's body of work. Miramax in turn funnels projects to X Filme members to direct (Tom Tykwer's 2002 film *Heaven* was a product of this arrangement). While recent trends in cofinancing, distribution, and marketing have made European films more competitive on the global market, Jäckel argues that this competition has hurt smaller distributors and exhibitors. In one case study, she describes the impact of the megaplex UGC Ciné-Cité in the center of Paris; within two years of its opening, the small, independent cinemas of the Latin Quarter had lost a quarter of their audience.

In compiling the *Historical Dictionary of French Cinema*, Dayna Oscherwitz and Maryellen Higgins were faced with the daunting task of creating a canon of French cinema. Despite the usual criticisms of such historical dictionaries—for example, how do you sum up the twists and turns and revolutionary impact of Jean-Luc Godard's prolific career in three pages?—this book provides a nice refresher course for French film buffs or a basic introduction for newcomers to France's long cinematic history. The authors have amassed an impressive body of information about the directors, movies, actors, and movements that defined French cinema, while documenting recent trends that have blurred the boundaries of such traditional notions of national cinema. From the dozens of cross-listed entries, the reader gets a sense of how national identity has always played a central role in French film, from the staged documentaries of the Lumière brothers to the more recent heritage films, with their equally imagined construction of historic events and nostalgic longing for a mythical French past. The authors also highlight the works of female directors like Alice Guy, head of Gaumont film production from 1897 to 1906, and Agnès Varda, Diane Kurys, and Claire Denis, all of whom explored and to varying degrees critiqued the representation of women in film. Discussions of iconic actresses such as Sarah Bernhardt, Arletty, Brigitte Bardot, Cathérine Deneuve, and Isabelle Huppert point to a greater diversity of women's roles in French cinema than their counterparts in Hollywood.

A very different perspective on film and identity informs *East European Cinemas*, edited by Anikó Imre, which reevaluates Eastern European cinema in light of the sweeping political, economic, and social changes of the past two decades. This collection of essays retains the all-encompassing label of "Eastern European" film, a monolithic term that erases cultural differences, while acknowledging both the usefulness of the category and its unstable boundaries. In the introduction, Imre argues that global capitalism has rapidly transformed not only the cultures of Eastern Europe but also the traditional ways of looking at East European cinema. Before 1989, most scholarship on East European cinema was framed by the ideological demands of the Cold War, privileging, as Imre points out, the directors who heroically stood in defiance of their barbaric communist oppressors. The authors move beyond the reductive criticism of older historians and critics, rereading the cinema of the Soviet era as well as engaging the emerging body of work in the new field of post-socialist cinema. The essay topics include a wide array of critical perspectives: transnational border crossings in the films of Polish filmmaker Agnieszka Holland and Hungarian director Ibolya Fekete, psychoanalytic readings of the work of Czech New Wave directors Vera Chytilová and Ester Krumbachová, and the fragmented, disorienting, postmodern worlds in the movies of the new generation of East European filmmakers, including Bohdan Slama and Petr Zelenka, whose work raises questions of forgetting and remembering in an age of historical amnesia.

BOOK DATA

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